Adventure

FOR LA SOLEDAD
fight for a ranch, a girl and ilroad in Central America.
COMPLETE NOVEL

An H. D. COUZENS Story
JUST BAIT
Englehart, the South Sea er, stirs up quite a lot of trouble.

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e Ivory Dome" and some League players are waked up in the night.

HE HEART OF THE VOLUNTEER
story of American soldiers in the Philippines.

TALE OF THE MOVIES
called "A Woodtick, an Ant, a Flea," but it isn't about bugs.

DILLINGHAM'S BILL
which a Legislature meets up with a joke.

E QUEEN OF THE SPECIES
story for those who know, or want to know, the jungle.

IE BABY AND THE WIRELESS
is isn't anything except a ugh—and some S. O. S. calls.

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"THE LAUGHING CAVALIER"

By
BARONESS ORCZY
Author of

A DASHING STORY OF THE MAN WHO SAT FOR FRANS HALS' FAMOUS PAINTING—AN ANCESTOR OF THE *SCARLET PIMPERNEL*

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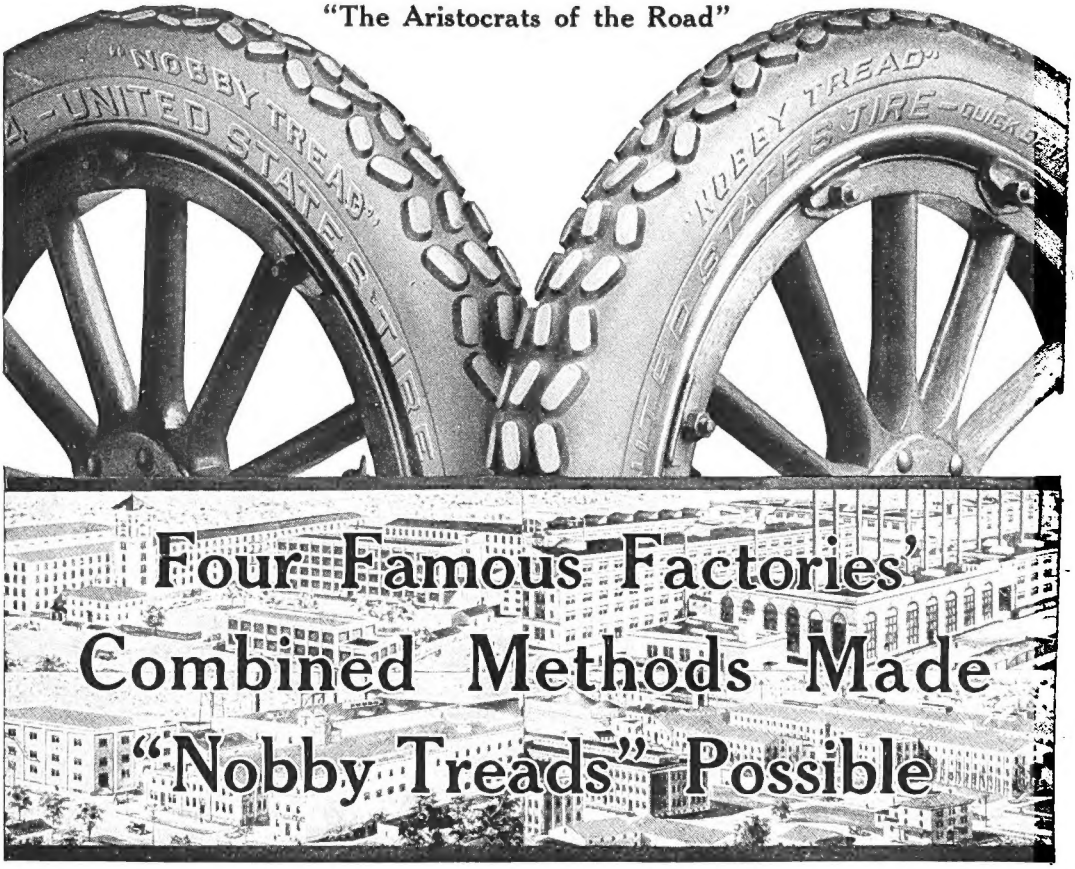
"The Aristocrats of the Road"



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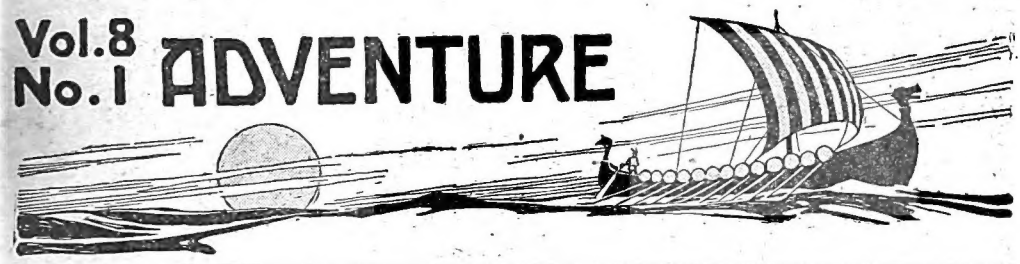

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FOR NEARLY TWO YEARS

we've been trying to get some more stories like them. But he was too busy with the practise of medicine. Readers kept asking for them. There weren't any.

But at last he found the time, and there will be a book-length novel by him in the next issue (June, out May 3). It was worth waiting two years for. It's

A Dan Wheeler Story

All who read them will remember Dan or "Sled" Wheeler, the king-criminal, and the stories told about him by Corbin, the doctor of Blackwell's Island Prison. The new story is even stronger than "The Crook and the Doctor," "The Open Night," etc. It's as strong as its title—"A Drop of Doom."

We could sell the June number if there were nothing in it except this one story. Instead, we have put into it a dozen other stories that make the June ADVENTURE the best ADVENTURE ever printed. You will find full information on the last page of this issue in your hands. Here are a few items:

A Talbot Mundy Story—About a Jew who makes good in the British Army.
The Wizards—By Frank Blighton. Complete Novelette.
The Laughing Cavalier—By Baroness Orczy. A Four-Part Story begun in this issue.
Miss Demonstrator—By C. Hilton-Turvey.

Turn to the last page of this number in your hands and find out about these and other big features of

The June ADVENTURE

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1914
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For La Soledad

by Harold Kellock and George Shepherd

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH FATE GETS BOBBY WORDEN INTO A SAD PICKLE AND THEN RELENTS A LITTLE

BOBBY WORDEN sat alone in a low wicker chair on the broad veranda of the Club Internacional of Santa Cecilia and gazed out unhappily upon the thronged plaza. The perfect tropical night had called forth a gay crowd that moved along the broad walks winding between the maze of trees and shrubbery. Confetti was flying like snow. The place rang with laughter and happy chatter. Light dresses flashed everywhere against the dark background of foliage.

Bobby thought morosely he had never seen so many pretty girls. Though they wore a trifle too much color on their cheeks for a northerly taste, they were unquestionably lovely. They were bareheaded, for in Latin-American countries, despite the traditions of comic opera, the mantilla is generally worn only to church. Slender, wasp-waisted, slim-footed, they strolled about gracefully on the arms of dapper little cavaliers flourishing canes and adorned with wonderfully curled mustaches.

More prosperous persons rode slowly

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around the park in open victorias hung with bells which jingled perpetually. The sidewalk cafés, with merry parties crowded about the diminutive tables, were patches of brighter color about the square. Beyond a fringe of royal palms a rocket flared through the air like a flying star. Somewhere a band played at intervals—everything from a new "trot" comparatively fresh from Broadway to a *mêlange* of "Carmen," done with fine spirit, if with somewhat too much blare. In the intervals between the music the shrill cries of lottery vendors rose above the medley of sounds:

"*¡Suerte, suerte, señores! ¡Billete de lotería! ¡Veinte mil pesos!*"

("Try your luck, gentlemen! Ticket for the lottery! Twenty thousand dollars!")

Santa Cecilia was merry. It was a saint's day, and the city had flung its cares to the winds. In all Santa Cecilia Bobby Worden appeared to be the only person who hung aloof from this spirit of high carnival.

A broad-chested German came dancing clumsily out of the salon through one of the French windows and took a few steps toward Bobby. His heavy, jovial face was beaded with perspiration and a sprinkling of confetti mingled in his thin blond hair.

"We haf de brimrose path deserted," he chanted. "Now we make a little poker. Yes?"

Still dancing, he dealt some imaginary cards.

Behind the Teutonic Dionysos appeared one of his fellow countrymen, a commission merchant, like himself; also a lean English banker, an American mine manager, and a swarthy little French soldier of fortune.

"Oh, I say, Worden, are you on?" asked the Englishman. "Don't be a silly ass, Schmidt."

"No, thanks," said Bobby. "I don't think I'll sit in the game tonight."

"Too many white dresses on the plaza this evening, eh?" commented the American.

"*Jugend!*" cried Schmidt waving his arms. "*Ach, Jugend!* Vat a ding it iss!"

They chaffed themselves back through the window and withdrew to the sacred precincts of the card room.

Their diagnosis of Bobby's refusal was incorrect, however. Apparently he thought so little of the white dresses on the square that presently he left his seat overlooking the festival and wandered into the long salon of the Club. The bare chamber was deserted and wore an air of gloom. Bobby dropped into one of the immense rattan lounging chairs that were arranged, Latin-American fashion, in two formal rows the length of the room.

As he sat he stared into the stern and forbidding countenance of a marble Garibaldi. Back of him a lugubrious steel engraving of Lincoln frowned down upon his head. Bobby searched in his pockets and produced two soiled bills and some change, which he laid on the arm of the chair. He counted this over carefully. It came to $2.32, and represented his entire fortune. Then he stuffed it back into his pocket.

"You've got to get a job, young man. *Pronto!*" he said to himself, smacking his lips appreciatively over the new-found Spanish word.

And then, because he was nearly penniless and alone in a strange and alien place, and twenty-three, he laughed. But it was not the laugh of hearty mirth.

PROBABLY he laughed because his whole predicament seemed ridiculous. It appeared almost incredible. He had never worried about money. He had never thought anything about money. Money had been something you wrote to your father about from college, and it appeared in the form of checks for fifty or a hundred dollars.

But money had loomed up as a terrible and sinister thing one day when he received a telegram telling him that his father had shot himself. Ill advised speculation had brought on this catastrophe. And when the creditors and the lawyers got through, Bobby sold the family furniture to pay the funeral bills.

He left college and, through a friend, secured a job in the brokerage office of Cunningham & Spee at ten dollars a week. And he secured his initiation into cheap boarding-houses.

At the office Bobby ran errands, and learned to do a trick on the books, and went to the bank carrying bags of securities which were attached to his body by heavy chains. But the times were dull. Most of the activity of the office consisted in matching quarters or playing checkers at fifty cents a game. This was not Bobby's idea of a business career. He wanted a future and he wanted to get after it quick. He

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was game, even for the cheap boarding-house and hash and prunes—but there was the Girl.

Gladys Wentworth he believed the most beautiful girl in the world. She was, in fact, remarkably pretty — a dainty fairy with the softest of golden hair, the most delicate of complexions, eyes the color of cornflowers. With all the reverence of a clean, healthy boy he worshiped her diminutive perfection. She was a capricious tyrant, this elf girl, but he loved her the more for her caprices.

Bobby's mother and Gladys's mother had been schoolgirl chums, so he had known Gladys since childhood. But Bobby had never noticed her particularly before his first vacation from college. In fact, he had not particularly noticed that there were girls in the world.

He was astounded to discover that the child in petticoats whom he had teased or disdained had developed into a fairy princess of birdlike grace and rare beauty. She could not be disregarded any more. But she was startlingly new and elusive. He found himself stammering and shy in her presence, while she was perfectly at ease. And now it was the girl that teased and disdained.

But he was an honest and constant lover, and subsequently he attained prestige by making the varsity baseball team. And early in his senior year the wonderful girl became engaged to him—wore his ring. The world seemed all love and roses then.

The catastrophe of his father's death transformed the situation. Even though she believed she loved Bobby very much, the fairy princess found her engagement to a ten-dollar-a-week clerk rather irksome. She had no illusions about love in a cottage.

It was Gladys who originally suggested Santa Cecilia.

The great Lessington—Lessington the best halfback ever, two years before Bobby's time—was at Santa Cecilia. Gladys heard he was making a fortune there, and this Bobby could readily believe. He could picture Lessington sweeping through Central America, carrying all before him, conquering, subduing, organizing, creating greatness and wealth in little yellow countries no one had ever heard of before.

Gladys got Bobby a letter of introduction, and enclosing this he wrote to the great athlete asking about prospects. A fortnight passed and Bobby began to fear lest the hero would not deign to reply to a person so insignificant as himself. But a few days later came a cable from Lessington, collect, which read—

Come on in; water fine.

Bobby and Gladys read their fortunes in this, and speculated on how soon he could return with his pockets full of gold. Bobby pored over maps of the Central American country—Veragua was its name—and purchased a Spanish dictionary.

Before his departure Gladys's mother intimated that until his "prospects" assumed more definite shape the formal engagement should be suspended. And this Bobby readily conceded. He was delighted that Gladys agreed to keep his ring—a gorgeous pearl set in a circle of diamonds. She transferred it as he was passing Sandy Hook to her right hand and told herself it would always remind her of Bobby. He had been vaguely disappointed that Gladys could not see him off. But his boat sailed at ten o'clock in the morning, and Gladys never got up before noon.

IT WAS a brilliant tropical morning when Bobby's ship steamed into the little harbor known in the native tongue as Santa Cecilia. The gay little town, with its houses painted in pinks and greens and blues, shone gaudily against its background of dark hills. But once he had landed and stood staring along its narrow streets, it seemed transformed to a sort of tropical slum, all mud and negroes and smells. He had expected Lessington to meet him at the pier, for he had cabled the great man upon sailing. But Lessington was not there. And with a feeling of disappointment he made his way to the principal hotel, an insectiferous hostelry with the misleading title of Hotel de Sueño Dulce (Hotel of Sweet Sleep).

In the café, at a little marble-top table, sprawled a fat, flabby creature with a puffed red face. Bobby stopped short, dropped some of his baggage, and felt his own face grow crimson. He told himself this could not be Lessington. But he knew it was Lessington—not only drunk, but shabby, with soiled linen.

Leaning over Lessington's chair stood an elderly native of a sort of rapacious distinction. His pose suggested the vulture. He

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wore a remarkable purple and green waistcoat and a golden cable of watch chain, and diamond rings sparkled on his slender fingers.

He was talking earnestly to Lessington, who nodded in stupid acquiescence while he fingered a half filled glass in front of him. The older man seemed to be dunning Lessington. With a final emphatic word, accompanied by a glance of malevolent contempt, he started away. Bobby noticed then that the whites of his eyes were flecked with brown specks, as if acid had been spattered across them.

With a curious sensation of aversion and disgust, Bobby watched this person walk with mincing steps out of the room. Then he stepped up to the table.

Lessington had apparently forgotten about Bobby's arrival. His eyes rested upon Bobby for an instant without interest, and then he stared gloomily at his glass. But when Bobby mentioned his name, Lessington suddenly remembered; and he glanced up, then, with a sort of alcoholic eagerness.

"Jes' br'feshing," he explained, rising a bit unsteadily. "Have li'l bracer? Great things these—*guayacáns.*"

This tipple, Lessington profusely expounded, was named after a near-by copper mine where the American engineering staff, combining trained intelligence with an Art-for-Art's-sake love of the task, had discovered a blend of comparatively innocuous native liquors that had a real kick to it. Five "dead" glasses, in addition to the one half drained on the table before Lessington, revealed how many times he had been "kicked" at the breakfast table.

From the congenial topic of bracers he shifted suddenly to business, and for a few minutes talked steadily and to the point. He could get, he said, a concession in the rubber country. There was a fortune in it. But it needed capital. Ten or fifteen thousand to grease some official palms. And then, say, ten thousand more for prospectuses and initial development.

"But," faltered Bobby, "I haven't any money. I can't get any money."

"Eh?" exclaimed Lessington, looking at him sharply. "Then what the dev——"

"I thought I made that plain in my letter," said Bobby.

Lessington whistled.

"Thought your—hic—ol' man left a big wad," he said.

Bobby explained his real financial condition. Lessington drained his glass and scowled into it thoughtfully, and presently he stood up to intimate that the interview was at an end.

"What we want is cold, hard spondulix," he said. "That's right, isn't it? If you ain't got no money, needn't come around. What? Right O! Nothing doing. Now take my advice, y'understand. Advice. Go back to li'l old N'York and see your frien's. Get fifteen, twenty thousand dollars. Then we can do business. Otherwise, nothing doing, nothing doing."

Lessington ended in singsong tones. He suddenly clapped his hands and a yellow waiter appeared. Bobby withdrew.

He sat on a bench in the Plaza, in front of the hotel, while he recovered from the shock. At first this shock was largely on Lessington's account. As an undergraduate he had fed on Lessington. Lessington grit, Lessington pluck, Lessington skill had been traditional things in his world. Lessington was an institution, a religion. Fledgling athletes by the hundred were stirred to doughty deeds by the Lessington tradition.

And here was Lessington, the real Lessington—a poor, sodden, seedy creature, fuddled at eleven o'clock in the morning.

After a time Bobby ceased to wonder about the fall of Lessington and began to puzzle about his own future. He had been a fool. That was plain. He had jumped in the dark. But there he was, at any rate. Even on the boat, before he had reached the place, he had heard snatches of tales of fortune and development.

The country was rich. Men were coming out of the wilderness and spending with a lavish recklessness that made Santa Cecilia one of the wickedest little towns in the world. Surely a healthy, wide-awake young man could come by some of this gold. And anything was better than the brokerage office. Bobby registered a vow that he would never go back to playing checkers at ten dollars a week. Then he sought out the American Consul.

The consul, Aleck Dickey, was reading a newspaper from Ashtabula, Ohio, that was just one month old. He was a big, sloppy, lazy, shirt-sleeved man, with a slatternly wife, and a horde of slatternly children who were clambering over his chair and his desk and all the rest of the Consulate. He listened patiently to the tale of Bobby's

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trouble and aspirations, and though he knew of no openings, he donned a crash coat wrinkled like an accordion and waddled out to the Club and secured a card for Bobby.

That was the place where men who held the reins of commerce in their hands came to talk and plan. And though Bobby was in many respects a green youth, he knew that the most practical way to get employment was to meet the men who have jobs at their disposal.

Bobby had now been haunting the Club for a fortnight. But though he had many invitations to drink or play poker, he received none to work. Perhaps, he thought, he had not advertised his need for a job with sufficient vigor. He had not buttonholed any one with his demand. It seemed too confoundedly like begging.

But soon he would be going hungry, would probably find himself on the streets. He had been paying at his hotel by the week. And another payment must be made in a few days.

MAT THIS stage of Bobby's musings a man entered the room. It was Lathrop, who, Bobby knew, was an engineer in charge of a party of men making surveys for a new railroad somewhere up in the interior.

"I'll brace him," said Bobby.

Lathrop, rather to Bobby's surprise, instead of going through to the card or billiard room, came over to where he was sitting and dropped into the next chair.

"Hello, Worden," he said briefly, but in reply to Bobby's greeting vouchsafed no more conversation. Instead he wiped his glasses with deliberation, and then, taking an envelope from his pocket, proceeded to draw a number of haphazard lines on it.

Bobby watched him furtively. Aleck Dickey had referred to Lathrop as a "live wire." But his appearance, Bobby thought, scarcely suggested this appellation. He was a small, lean man with a receding chin, and mild gray eyes that peered benevolently through thick-lensed glasses. Bobby wondered whether he was thirty or forty.

Finally Lathrop finished his cryptic sketch, inspected the result critically and held it out for Bobby to see.

"It'll tap some good country, won't it?" he remarked.

Bobby looked at the envelope covered with lines and dots and hatchings.

"Yes," he admitted. "It will. What is it?"

Lathrop smiled a little strangely, almost as if he had not expected Bobby to admit his ignorance, but was not altogether disappointed.

"That, my son," he said, "is a map of this part of the country with special reference to the Barrancas & Western Railroad. Do you see it now?"

Bobby studied the sketch for a minute, but it was all Greek to him.

"No," he said finally, "I don't." He felt that his stupidity was surely killing his chances of getting a job.

Lathrop, looking at him quizzically, began to explain, and before long Bobby gathered that somewhere about the middle of the envelope was a big tract of rich country without any transportation facilities; that its only outlet at present was over miserable roads to the terminus of a decaying little railroad that ran inland from Santa Cecilia.

A railroad traversing this fertile inland region and running down to the sea at the bustling little port of Barrancas, about eighty miles northeast of Santa Cecilia, would not only get plenty of freight, but would immeasurably develop the whole district. The line of the projected road was nearly in the form of a V. This strange course, Lathrop explained, was necessary because the country inside the angle was all mountainous.

From Barrancas the road was to run due west for over seventy-five miles and then would sweep back, in a sharp northerly and easterly curve, across a notch in the lofty mountain chain in the interior and so through a rich valley to the inland city of Jucaro, the other terminus. The construction had already progressed from Barrancas about forty miles to within a few miles of a stream called Arroyo Hondo, which, by reason of its enormous bed rather than its normal volume of water, was a serious obstacle. This was being spanned by an immense wooden bridge.

Lathrop tapped with his pen point on a star representing the village of San Juan de los Puercos, which, according to his scale, was about twenty-five miles beyond the river.

"If we can push our rail head as far as

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San Juan within the next few weeks," he said, "we can keep on. Otherwise the Barrancas & Western Railroad will go the way of most South American enterprises. It will be left for the jungle to grow over it."

Bobby looked puzzled.

"Why?" he asked.

"Bondholders," replied Lathrop, grinning. "About San Juan lies the richest sugar country in this part of the world. Our prospectuses promised sugar freights this year—sure. If we can live up to the promise, Wall Street will loosen up with more money and we build the rest of the road.

"Otherwise we have to quit. The sugar-grinding season is approaching now, and we've got to be there if we want the business. It's a race against time. And the key to it all is that bridge. It's a whale of a job getting across that stream."

He paused a minute, his eyes glowing.

"Interesting, isn't it?" he asked.

"I should say so," cried Bobby, staring absorbedly at the map now.

"Of course I have practically nothing to do with the actual construction," continued Lathrop conversationally. "So long as we leave a string of stakes behind us that they can build the line to, we're supposed to earn our pay. We're what they call a location outfit."

"Oh, yes," said Bobby. "I've some idea what that is."

"Down in these countries they sometimes apply the General's definition of war."

"Hell?" said Bobby, with an upward inflection of surprise.

"Right," replied Lathrop.

Bobby surveyed the fragile-looking, nattily dressed Lathrop with a vague wonder how he made a success of such rough work. He waited for Lathrop to speak, but apparently the engineer had lost interest in the subject. He crumpled up his map and tossed it away and began whistling softly, while a faraway look stole into his eyes.

"He has no use for a dub like me," thought Bobby disconsolately.

"WE JUST lost one of our gang, by the way," pursued Lathrop, after a long pause, "and we need another white man who has some hustle and is not afraid of getting his feet wet. Dickey mentioned you. The job is good for sixty a month and board."

The gray eyes were now fixed keenly upon Bobby.

"Say that again," demanded Bobby.

"Sixty dollars a month. Can't give more than that." Bobby produced his $2.32.

"This is my wad," he said. "Sixty dollars looks like a fortune to me."

Lathrop counted out six clean American ten-dollar bills—Bobby had never noticed the peculiar beauty of ten-dollar bills before—and handed them over.

"You may need this," he said.

"You take chances in this country," said Bobby as he took the bills.

"I think it won't get lost," said Lathrop. "I suppose you haven't done anything like this before."

"No," sighed Bobby. "See here," he added. "I don't want you to get stung with me under false pretenses. I'm just out of college. I can play the mandolin and second base—and that's about all. Though I'm pretty good on second base."

Lathrop bit off the end of a cigar.

"This is a tougher job than second base," he said, "and there isn't any grand stand. As to your not knowing anything about this job, you showed me that, but you didn't try to fake knowledge you didn't have. I'm not stuck on college men as a rule, but I don't expect experts for the money—not in this part of the world. I like to get men green, so long as they've common sense and keep sober on the job. Don't have to unteach them, then."

"I'm ultramarine, all right," confessed Bobby.

"I'll write you a line to Riley, the man I left in charge," pursued Lathrop briskly. "We're at San Juan now. You'll start for the camp in the morning. Take the thing they call a railroad as far as Trinidad and I'll have a man meet you there with a mule. Train leaves at six. I hope you can stand the gaff."

He went to a table in a corner of the room and scribbled a note which he handed to Bobby. "Don't let 'em get your goat, Worden," he admonished. "They'll try."

As soon as Lathrop left the room Bobby rushed to the table and began to write rapidly.

DEAREST GIRL:

Luck came out of the wilderness and shook hands with me tonight. I'm on the track of that fortune——

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In the first rush of his youthful enthusiasm, he had no doubt of this.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH BOBBY FINDS A PARIS GOWN IN THE MIDST OF THE JUNGLE

THE next morning Bobby was up before daylight, for he had thirty miles to go by train and then another thirty by horse or mule back to reach the scene of his new career, the village of San Juan de los Puercos. He awoke with eager anticipations of adventure in the new life, and with a feeling of the most profound joy at escaping the wretched hotel and the odors of Santa Cecilia.

He laughed aloud as he entered the rickety train whose ramshackle cars showed, beneath the scaling paint, the words "Long Island Railroad," and whose ancient, asthmatic locomotive bore the faded letters "B. R. T."

"All aboard for Coney!" he cried gaily as he flung his baggage upon a seat.

The train, however, was in no hurry to start for Coney Island or anywhere else. It was half an hour behind the scheduled starting-time when a man walked down the platform ringing a dinner bell, the engineer mounted in leisurely fashion into his cab, the locomotive whistle piped twice in querulous treble and the rattletrap train jerked out of the station.

The train ambled, rather than ran, through a flat, open, deserted country and stopped in the midst of fields apparently whenever the engineer decided he needed a rest. But in less than three hours they grunted and squeaked their way into the little village of Trinidad, a huddle of native huts that was at once the terminus of the railroad and Bobby's point of departure for the country beyond.

On the platform an astoundingly black negro, with the girth of a hippopotamus, clad in tattered black trousers and a huge crimson undershirt, waddled toward Bobby, grinning and showing the whites of his eyes.

"Good marnin', chief," he said in an atrocious negro-Cockney dialect impossible to reproduce. "Is you Mistah Wo'den? I'se been warned by Mistah Lathrop to furnish you transpo'tation to de camp, sah."

Bobby took one astounded look and choked with laughter.

"Right O, Harvard!" he responded. "What have you got? A Packard or a Pierce Arrow?"

"I doan' rightly understan' you, chief," replied the crimson shirt with dignity. "My name am not Harvard. It am Clarence—Clarence Percy of Jamaica. I'se a British objec', sah. And the mule what I 'as segregated fo' you, sah, am called Maud."

"All right, Clarence," said Bobby. "Bring on your Maud."

He followed the negro to the other side of the platform, where three mules were hitched. One, it seemed, was for Bobby, one had the apparently impossible task of carrying the portly Clarence and the third was fitted with a pack saddle to transport Bobby's baggage.

Clarence began to dilate on the length of the journey they had before them, though at the same time he acted as if it were a matter of no moment whether they got started then or an hour later. So Bobby took matters into his own hands (except the actual affixing of the bag to the pack saddle, which was a mystery beyond his divination) and within fifteen minutes of the time the train had pulled in they rode off.

The road quickly left the straggling village behind it and wound over an open, rolling country through fields of something that looked to Bobby like corn. Without asking any questions of Clarence, and solely by the use of his own deductive powers, he correctly concluded that he was catching his first view of fields of sugar cane.

The mules settled into a little running walk that covered the ground at a very fair rate, and before long they left the cane fields behind and mounted into a region of more decided hills, where the only evidences of cultivation were numbers of straggly-looking bushes covered with red berries. "Cranberries," thought Bobby. But here he was at fault, for presently Clarence called ahead to him—

"Dis heah am de fines' coffee land in de country, sah."

"Yes," answered Bobby truthfully, "it's the best-looking coffee I've ever seen growing."

Then the road became narrower and rougher, the patches of coffee fewer and farther apart, and in an hour more they were picking their way along a trail that was merely a gully of mud through the dense,

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silent jungle. Overhead the branches came together and shut out the sun so completely that it was only by an occasional spot of blue sky that Bobby could tell it was still shining. On either side a solid wall of rank, luxuriant vegetation hemmed them in.

This lonely path they followed until the middle of the afternoon, when they came upon a little clearing containing a palm shack surrounded by coffee bushes. A slatternly crone who jabbered a greeting to Clarence stood in the doorway, and naked yellow children sprawled in front of the house. Presently they came upon a whole group of these shacks; and finally, from an open space at the top of a rise, Bobby caught a glimpse ahead of an open valley, green with cane fields and pastures; and in the middle of it the red-tiled roofs of a village, which, Clarence told him, was his destination.

"Hurray for St. John of the pigs and pork chops for supper!" cried Bobby.

And, assured by the negro that there was no chance of losing his way, he started ahead at a brisk trot.

NEAR the edge of the open country he passed a train of half a dozen laden pack mules with two yellow-skinned native packers going in his direction, and at the turn in the road just beyond he saw a solitary horse and rider on the sky line at the top of the next rise. The horseman was standing still, apparently gazing intently along the jungle-shrouded road that Bobby had just come over. But while Bobby was idly puzzling over the cause of this tense watch, he saw the equestrian cut the horse over the flank with a whip and start toward him at a headlong gallop.

"I wonder if that chap is coming after me," thought Bobby, pulling up hastily. "He's sure in a hurry."

He discreetly drew his mule to one side of the road and waited. Then he nearly fell out of the saddle with excitement. The rider was a girl! A white girl, and a beauty too! What in the name of all that was wonderful was she doing out here? But he had little time to think or wonder. The girl came tearing down the road, bareheaded, brown hair whipping about her face. She showed no signs of slowing up, but shouted to Bobby something in Spanish. As she passed him she saw her mistake and called in English: "Come along! Quick!"

Bobby was not a youth to run away from an adventure, and this certainly smacked of something exciting. But she was a hundred yards down the road before he could get the indignant Maud into her stride. He followed along at the best speed he could, and in a few seconds saw the cause of the girl's wild rush. The pack train he had recently passed had come to a stop and more yellow-skinned men, armed with carbines, had appeared from somewhere and were busy going through the packs.

"It's a hold-up," thought Bobby, and he frantically drove his spurs into Maud.

The girl was altogether too far ahead, and she did not seem to have any intention of waiting for him. Nor could he shorten the distance between them. Presently he saw her hold a revolver over her head and shoot into the air. The men looked up, and two of them promptly took to their heels and ducked into the nearest clump of bushes. The three others left their task of looting the packs, and for a moment looked as if they meant resistance, but before they had time to collect their wits she was on them.

One of them went down fair and square before her horse. Another she struck over the head with her revolver as she swept past. The third waited no longer, but hurriedly took to his heels and joined his friends in the bushes.

It all happened in the twinkling of an eye; and by the time Bobby got up hostilities were over and the two packers, having crawled out of their haven of safety in a near-by ditch, were excitedly tying up the two unconscious highwaymen. The girl had checked her horse and came riding back.

"Much obliged to you, I'm sure," she said to Bobby with an unconcerned smile.

Bobby laughed.

"Pardon me. I can't help it," he said. "I don't see what you can possibly be obliged to me for. But I certainly ought to be grateful to you for letting me see the finest little plunge through the center that has ever been made on any field."

The girl laughed too. People generally did when Bobby laughed.

"Oh!" she said, "that was easy. These wretched *bandoleros* never stand up to anything. Go at them good and hard and they are sure to run."

"What was it all about?" asked Bobby.

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"They thought it was the monthly pay-roll money for the plantation and they were after it. But it wasn't. That got up last night, and this lot is mostly supplies for the plantation store."

"Weren't you taking a pretty long chance to save a lot of groceries? One of those fellows might have got ugly, you know."

"It wasn't the groceries," said the girl. "You see, this pack train happened to be bringing a new dress for me. It came from Paris, and it's the first respectable evening dress I've had for two years. So I didn't exactly fancy having the barefooted wife of any *bandolero* wearing that."

Bobby looked at her with respectful awe.

"If she lived in New York," he thought, "and wanted a new dress, I suppose she'd just take that pearl-handled gun of hers and go out and get it."

But he said nothing. Somehow he could not seem to think of a suitable remark.

"Well," said the girl, "we had best be thinking of making a start back, or it will be dark before we get in."

Dismounting, she helped the men arrange and repack the cargoes, a work to which Bobby also attempted to turn his hand, but found it of intricate difficulty. In a few minutes, however, everything was ready and they resumed the interrupted journey, the pack train and the two prisoners, together with Clarence, who had come up meantime with Bobby's pack-mule, going ahead, and Bobby and the girl bringing up the rear. Bobby's overwhelming curiosity was demanding satisfaction, and as the most tactful way of obtaining information, he proceeded to offer it.

"I might ask my friend Clarence here to present me with proper ceremony, but I don't suppose it is necessary. My name is Worden—Robert Worden, late of New York; at present, or soon to be, of San Juan de los Puercos."

"Oh, you must be coming out on the railroad work," she cried, with a smile of frank cordiality. "I am very glad to see you; and being on the Barrancas & Western is all the credentials you need out here. You see, we have an interest amounting to a positive affection for that road. Of course—how stupid! I am Grace Quintard and my father owns the Soledad plantation, near San Juan, and your railroad is going to save our lives for us, or our fortunes at any rate."

"I certainly seem to have jumped into a wealth of opportunities to save things," thought Bobby. "First a Paris gown, then their entire fortune. Hope I take a more active part in the next salvage."

Meanwhile he had noted that she rode her horse as if she were part of it, that every motion of her body was graceful and free, and that sun and wind had tinted her face with a splendid color. Aloud he said:

"I don't want to travel under false pretenses. I'm not a director or a chief engineer. I just got a plain job—not even a position—on this road last night and I don't know much about it. But I do understand that your sugar means a lot to the road."

"We really have the finest cane land in the country," she assured him, "only we can't get the sugar out profitably. Every pound of it has to be hauled over this road in bull carts and be shipped on the little railroad you came out on this morning. But when your line reaches San Juan it will go right through our plantation, and then we can ship direct down to the port of Barrancas. It will make just the difference between making and losing money, that's all."

Bobby's recent experience had impressed the full meaning of that difference on him.

"Mr. Lathrop said they were rushing the rails to San Juan as fast as possible," he remarked hopefully.

"They can't hurry too fast for us," said the girl. "You see, unless the railroad gets to us by the time the grinding-season opens, we can't hold the plantation any longer."

"You mean——" began Bobby.

"Oh, it's absolutely no secret. Everybody knows all about it, so there's no harm in my telling you. The place is mortgaged, of course—everything is in this country—and if we can't make a profit out of this year's crop, it goes; that's all.

"But we're going to win this year. We've got to. There really isn't much doubt that the road will be up in time. Mr. Fessenden—he's the General Manager, you know—told father he would have it as far as the plantation if he had to get out and lay the rails with his own hands. He's a man who can generally get results when he tries, and he's doing his best to hurry things up and save La Soledad for us."

Bobby thought her frankness charming, but it rather startled him. He had not had any experience of exile and isolation from his own kind to make him realize how

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easy it becomes to open one's heart to a congenial stranger from the home land. Nor did he at any time in his life appreciate that he was always being made the recipient of many more outspoken confidences than other men normally received. His embarrassment caused a little silence, for he did not like to ask questions about or comment on what she had told him.

"Do you like living out here?" he asked abruptly, after an interval.

THE girl looked at him quizzically a moment.

"I'm crazy about it," she replied. Then she added, laughing:

"If I weren't, it would probably make me crazy. It's a case of have to. Let me tell you. In the first place, there's father. His usual custom is to get up at four in the morning and go out to the fields somewhere. He may be back to lunch, but generally isn't. If I can find him, we may ride about together while he looks after things—and I have only fifteen thousand acres to hunt for him in. Then, if I don't find him, I associate with the rest of the family, which consists of me."

The obvious complimentary inanity was on the tip of Bobby's tongue, but he swallowed it hastily.

"But there are more people on the plantation, aren't there?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. There is Bonito, the bookkeeper, saddle-colored and very good at figures. There is Rodriguez, the mill Superintendent, white, Spanish, and usually drunk when the mill is not grinding. Then there is Amador, the *mayordomo,* light yellow and very forceful when he is handling laborers; but he has only that one vocabulary, and unfortunately I understand Spanish.

"Once in a while some of the Americans in the party you are going to join get as much as an hour off work and come over to see us, and then occasionally Mr. Fessenden drops in. That dress I told you about —do you know what I am going to do with it? Well, I'm going to put it on and stand in front of a mirror and make believe."

And she laughed, not cynically, but as if, after all, the whole thing were a good joke.

"It must be dull for a girl," said Bobby thoughtfully.

"No, it isn't really as bad as it sounds," she said. "Of course I get lonely sometimes, but after all there is a good deal that is worth while in the life. I am out of doors all the time, riding about and helping father. It's healthy and invigorating and all that. Really I don't mind it, because I love the old place and I know it is going to make our fortune."

It was beginning to grow dark when they reached the village. Though Bobby wanted to ride with her as far as the plantation house, she refused to let him, and after pointing out the place where the surveying party lived, she rode off at a gallop—first, however, giving him a warm invitation to come and see them at Soledad whenever he might find time.

The house that Bobby approached was one of the better-looking dwellings in the little village. It was larger than the others, the adobe walls wore a clean coat of whitewash, the roof of bright red tiles held forth a promise of being weather proof, and the two steps leading up to the front door denoted the presence of that most rare of architectural luxuries, a floor.

The first thing that met Bobby's eyes as he stood for a moment in the open door was a sight to gladden his heart. Three young men were sitting down to dinner.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH ARE MUCH MUD AND THE BEGINNING OF A MYSTERY

BOBBY looked at his watch. It was six o'clock. He next took out his pedometer and noted that the dial showed he had already come three miles. That left five more back to camp. Then he peered ahead at the narrow strip of mud winding through the jungle which was optimistically called the road.

When he had started out, shortly after daybreak that morning, he had been an extremely dapper young man, with his new tan shoes, his smart riding-breeches, leather puttees and an olive-colored shirt with his initials embroidered in black silk upon the sleeve. But he was dapper no longer. In fact, his appearance would have shocked a Bowery hobo.

His clothes were gashed and torn and one of his sleeves had ripped off above the elbow. Clothing, face and hands were plastered with mud and slime. Across his cheek was a gash made by an unfriendly thorn bush. And his immaculate shoes had long since

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disappeared. In their place were two shapeless lumps of mud.

Central America, Bobby conceded, produced a very superior brand of mud. As he struggled along the road, the mixture was of sufficiently light consistency to splash him in the face and at the same time sticky enough to wrench his ankle with the suction at every step. To stiffen it both morally and physically it was intermeshed at all depths, all angles and in all directions by tough, wiry roots that tripped him continually.

Moreover, every muscle and every bone in Bobby's body ached with the labors of his strenuous day and protested each step.

Thawn, Palmer and Riley, the three Americans who composed Lathrop's party, had proved very agreeable fellows when Bobby met them the night before. Thawn was a red-headed Irishman with irrepressible spirits; Palmer a pale and scholarly-looking young man who wore thick eyeglasses, and Riley was a positive, square-cut, chunky fellow with a bulldog jaw.

They occupied the only house in the village with a leakless roof, and the commissary appeared to be run on a lavish scale. Bobby's sample dinner had revealed a gem of a cook. Bobby was not aware, of course, that the outfit had practically resorted to kidnapping to lure that functionary from the galley of a Royal Mail liner, and that his salary was equal to Bobby's own.

During the evening's conversation, Bobby had gathered that they were working five miles north of the village, but saddles and horse equipment lying about the house indicated that they rode to their work.

In the morning he was awakened before daybreak. He dressed himself in his nobby working-clothes and added thereto a canteen, a big forty-five revolver with some thirty spare rounds in the cartridge belt, and a pedometer. He was rather proud of these possessions, but the others appeared merely to glance at them casually. Yet from time to time one of them would retire to the patio and, if Bobby had listened sharply, he might have heard strange, choking sounds.

When the horses were brought up he noticed there were only three. He wondered who was not going out. But each of his three companions picked out a horse and swung into the saddle.

"Here, Snowball," Riley called to the foreman of the gang of negro ax and machete men who were getting ready to start. "You show Mr. Worden the way."

Bobby saw the point. The hazing that Lathrop had hinted at was about to begin. With a grin he leaned down and removed his spurs, and guided by the ragged and uncouth-looking negro, he walked five miles to reach his day's work.

All day long, under the tutelage of Palmer, he carried a ten-foot rod across a diversified, muddy landscape, holding it up when told, to allow Palmer to peer at it through a telescope. When first given the rod, he had started off at a brisk walk in the direction indicated.

"I say, rodman," Palmer's rich Harvard accent halted him.

"—— it, run! *Run!* RUN!" said Palmer. And Bobby ran.

Occasionally he was permitted to wash off the mud by carrying the rod to the far side of some stream, shallow for swimming, but deep for wading. Palmer, with his air of academic gravity, always seemed desirous of squinting at the rod across the widest streams.

The day's work had stopped when Palmer could no longer see clearly through his instrument. A negro came up with his horse, and Palmer mounted and sat at ease in his saddle while giving Bobby specific instructions how to get back on the trail.

"We drove that last hub one hundred and five stations and sixty and two-tenths feet ahead of where we started this morning," he said. "Now you know how far you've got to go back."

Bobby, painfully applying some of his new-found information, arrived at the conclusion that he had to walk two miles and two-tenths of a foot to reach the place where they had begun work. From there it was five miles back to camp.

Palmer's horse had quickly borne him out of Bobby's sight, and the young man started after him on his toilsome journey immediately. Behind him tramped the squad of blacks, chattering alternately in Spanish and the peculiar Afro-Cockney of the Jamaica native. But soon he began to distance them, and their uncouth jargon died away. He had found the trail and he slumped along as fast as he could under the conviction that the only possibility of reaching camp that night lay in making all speed.

As he struggled on, there was a startlingly

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quick transition from day to night, and his pathway became merely a murky patch between two black walls of foliage. This naturally made the going still more difficult. The place was full of monstrous fireflies, like evanescent candles, but these did not light the way. He crashed into bushes and stumbled against trees continually. But this, he ruefully figured, was all part of the game. He was being hazed, but they would not get his goat. He had not been a freshman for nothing.

"I got something out of my college training anyway," thought Bobby, as his ankle caught on a root and he stumbled into some bushes with unfriendly, spiked branches.

PRESENTLY a young moon climbed into view, and this gave him enough light to follow the trail, though not enough to pick his footing. He looked at his pedometer, which indicated that he had come six miles. That was encouraging. But when he had added two more to this and there was no sign of San Juan of the Pigs, his spirits began to fail. During that interval of darkness he must have got on the wrong trail.

But there was nothing for it but to go on now. The confounded trail must lead somewhere, anyway. So he continued to drag himself on. He resolved not to look at the deceptive pedometer again. But after an hour of slipping and stumbling, when no break had appeared in the walls of jungle, he yielded to a temptation to consult it. It read thirteen miles from the start.

Bobby strongly suspected he had not covered five miles during that hour, and he began to distrust the pedometer. He was puzzled and discouraged, and as hungry as a starved hippopotamus. But suddenly the explanation broke over him. At every jerk of his body in that uncertain footing the pedometer registered a full pace. The instrument was enjoying a veritable mileage riot. Shortly after he discovered this illuminating solution, the walls of jungle gave way to clearings and the trail broadened into the semblance of a real road. And presently, from a rise of ground, he made out the little village of San Juan huddled in the moonlight.

It looked intensely like home. And brightly homelike seemed the sprawling adobe "headquarters," on the broad porch of which sat Riley, Thawn and Palmer smoking fragrant Havanas.

The three men observed their rookie with admirable gravity as he came limping across the lawn.

"Tired?" asked Riley.

"You don't happen to have a medicine ball or a pair of Indian clubs here, do you?" asked Bobby. "I'd like to get up an appetite for dinner."

The two laughed; and Thawn said, "Good for you, kid," in a way that stiffened Bobby's backbone.

Dinner had been kept hot for him, and Bobby consumed a meal which, he suspected, probably marked a world's record in quantity. Then he went straight to his room, feeling an equal appetite for sleep. But while he sat there, nodding over a pipe and wondering if he had the energy to undress, Riley called him.

"Worden, check over these computations for me. Thawn will show you how to do it—and it won't take more than a couple of hours."

Bobby washed his eyes open with cold water, joined Thawn at a table in the big living-room, and was quickly instructed in his arithmetical task. Presently Thawn went to his room. Shortly afterward Riley and Palmer strolled in and, after a few words, went off to bed. The house became silent. Bobby, who was not quick at figures, struggled with his computations, while he fought against leaden drowsiness.

From time to time he felt himself slipping into oblivion; and then he would rouse up with a start, pinch himself into activity and attack again the big note book Thawn had left in his charge. It was slower work, even, than plugging along that chewing-gum trail. Somewhere off in the darkness he could hear the voices of negroes droning a low, melancholy chant, and insects buzzed lazily about his lamp. . . .

Fifth Avenue seemed altogether natural. There opposite him loomed the red hulk of the Waldorf. Down beyond the Holland House the Avenue dwindled into a narrow trail hemmed in with a jungle out of which the Flatiron loomed oddly.

He was conscious of these details, though his attention was focused principally upon Gladys, in riding-breeches and a khaki jacket, seated upon the roof of a dashing taxicab brandishing what at first appeared to be a revolver, but soon developed quite

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naturally into a filmy Paris frock spangled with fireflies. A traffic policeman, who was fat and black and wore a flaming red undershirt, was galloping frantically after her on a mule, shouting something about a mortgage.

This word was in his ears as he awoke, sprawled across the table. The place was black, for the table lamp had gone out. On the veranda two men were talking in low tones.

"The old fool can't get any more credit," one was saying, with an air of authority. "We've got him cold. But I want things pressed a bit harder, Bustillo. There's got to be some trouble on that plantation soon."

"Señor Fessenden wants something besides the fat acres, is it not?" asked a voice with a slight foreign accent. "Something with bright eyes and lips of the poppy. Something——"

"Never mind that," cut in the other abruptly. "You stick to your job, Malaquias Bustillo, and I'll attend to my affairs. I want the pressure tightened from now on."

"*Sí, Señor*," purred the other. "If the bridge——"

"That had to be completed to put on what we call front," he said. "The directors unloaded some stock on that."

"If I may suggest, señor, accidents may happen to—a bridge," said the other.

The first man mumbled something in low tones. During this conversation Bobby was pulling himself together and getting his bearings. On his mind, blurred with sleep, the talk made no particular impression.

He sat up, yawned, and striking a match made an attempt to light the lamp. The oil was out. He took down another lamp from a bracket in the wall. At his first footstep the conversation outside abruptly ceased. As he was applying a match to the wick, he was interrupted.

"Who the devil are you and what are you doing here?"

Bobby stared into two cold gray eyes. A broad, handsome, thick-necked man confronted him, looking him over keenly.

"I was working," said Bobby, making a gesture toward the table. "I must have fallen asleep."

"Hum!" said the man, with a sneer. "This is the sort of job where you keep your eyes open and your ears closed. Understand? Now finish up, and get to bed and stay there."

He turned abruptly on his heel, and as he did so Bobby caught sight of the other man standing in the doorway. He was somewhat astonished to recognize him as the villainous-looking old Spaniard he had seen talking with Lessington in Santa Cecilia. The old fellow had changed his gaudy town clothes for a soiled suit of white canvas and patent-leather boots caked with mud. The other spoke to him sharply in Spanish, and the pair passed out into the night.

"I suppose the pleasant, soft-spoken brute is Fessenden," said Bobby to himself, picking up his pencil. "I wonder what the dickens he's framing up with that wicked-looking old Greaser at two o'clock in the morning?"

CHAPTER IV

CONCERNING THE HORSE WITH THE SOUND BACK AND TORN FLANKS

PEDRO, the head stable boy of the headquarters, led a big bay horse out of a stall and, tying it to the corral fence, prepared to give the animal a thorough grooming.

"Of whom is the horse, Don Pedro?" inquired Manuel, the yard boy, from his perch on the top rail of the fence.

Pedro, dirty, barefooted, hair peeping through the rents in his old straw hat, bridled and assumed great dignity at receiving the title "Don."

"Of whom should it be but the Meester Fess'den who has finish to arrive," he answered with condescension. "It would be advisable that from time to time you avail yourself of your head to think with."

Manuel, unrebuffed, continued meditatively sucking a piece of sugar cane while Pedro went on with his work.

"This Meester Fess'den is a señor who is very hard, no?" he said presently. Pedro, cleaning the dirt from the horse's hoofs, made no reply.

"But I tell you yes," went on Manuel. "Look you at the flanks of his horse. See where he has torn them with his spurs. Yet such a noble animal needs no spurring."

Pedro rose from his knees and examined the horse's flanks, which, true enough, were torn and bleeding. Then he ran his hand carefully over the horse's back.

"But the back, Manuel," he said. "See, it is sound. Not a mark or a scratch. Yet the Meester is a heavy man and has ridden far."

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Manuel took the cane stalk from his mouth and replied scornfully.

"Why not? That only proves that he is also a man of intelligence. He knows that a saddle gall unfits his horse to carry him the next day; but not so a torn flank. So, though he spurs hard, he sits lightly, but not to spare the horse—only for his own sake. It is such as he who started the proverb, 'A borrowed horse and my own spur.'"

Pedro, busy grooming the horse, made no reply. But Manuel, once he began to air his opinions, was not to be discouraged by silence.

"This same meester," he went on, "is not only hard with horses. Remember you the case of the *pobrecita* Angelita, who had the little shop in one of the railroad camps where she made her living selling *dulces* and coffee to the peons.

"Comes the order she must leave. No more *dulces* and coffee for the laborers, think you? But yes. Comes the shameless one, Isidro Castro, and opens a shop in the same place with permission of the *administrador*.

"And Isidro, who is he? No other but a son of an old mistress of the still more shameless Don Malaquias Bustillo. And how much, think you, did Don Malaquias pay to the grand Meester Fess'den for the privilege? Who knows?"

Pedro straightened up and turned on Manuel.

"Shameless one, thyself!" he said. "Thy head is empty and thy mouth overfull of words. It would be better to close it and talk no more idle chatter of one who is a grand señor and could crush thee to pieces in his fist if he thought it worth the trouble. Get thee to thine own work and bother me no more!"

The subject of this conversation had not risen until long after Riley and his surveying-party had departed for their work. He had breakfasted in leisurely fashion and then spent a solid hour working rapidly over correspondence and reports before he ordered his horse. Immaculate in shiny boots, in trousers and loose-fitting white riding-jacket of the finest duck, he rode toward La Soledad.

At the entrance of the plantation he paused, looking over the place appraisingly. A curved driveway, lined with royal palms, led to the broad, low plantation house which stood in a border of flowers.

Fessenden, who was not esthetic, did not bestow more than a glance at the long, splendid lines of this habitation. His eyes traveled rapidly over the other buildings—the row of trim little white houses at an interval to the right—the homes of the plantation staff; to the left the business-like "office," and farther off, partly concealed by a fold of ground, the group of stables.

But Fessenden's most appreciative glance rested upon the imposing gray bulk of the sugar mill, which stood across a broad open space back from the house, on a big patch of bare ground kept almost as clean as a New England floor, to guard against fires. The mill was not a gracious addition to the landscape. In fact, with its corrugated iron walls and its two tall, black, iron chimneys sticking up into the sky, it was unequivocally ugly. A faint smudge of smoke trailed from one of the stacks.

From the mill tracks radiated in all directions to the fields where the close-growing cane lay nearly ready for the harvest. The fields closely resembled fields of corn—corn of extraordinary profuseness, upsprung in a tangled mass, with remarkably long, ribbon-like leaves and brown-purple tassels flecking the rich background of green.

Now the broad expanse of fields seemed deserted. But in a few weeks hundreds of machetes, wielded by laborers varying in color from yellow to black, would be cutting down the sugar-laden stalks and loading them on the light cars which slow-moving oxen would haul to the mill. Fessenden could see scores of these cars now standing empty on sidings beside the mill.

Fessenden's gaze traveled over the fat acres to the farthest boundary, beyond which rose a tumbled, irregular mass of mountains, the *Montañas de Sal Si Puedes*, or Get Out If You Can, an inaccessible wilderness of jagged peaks, of scarred plateaux gashed by deep cañons, which had not been explored since the old Spanish days.

But Fessenden had no eye for this magnificent background. He saw only the splendid domain stretching before him, transforming the tropical sunshine into gold. Here, he knew, lay a fortune—as soon as the railroad came. As he looked about him, an avaricious glitter stole into his gray eyes and resolution was written on every line of his strong, purposeful face.

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TOUCHING his horse with the spur, he rode along the palm-tree drive to the house.

A servant informed him that Mr. and Miss Quintard were in the sugar mill, so he walked through the front of the house, out into the patio, which was a bower of palms and of tropical flowers vivid as multi-colored fireworks, and so across the open space to the unprepossessing structure where the ripe cane was transformed into raw sugar.

Grace was standing with her father on the concrete floor of the mill. They were testing some of the machinery. The huge cylinders of steel, arranged in a triple series of threes, which crushed the juice out of the cane, were slowly revolving, and the endless belt made of long wooden slats fastened across iron chains, on which the cane was conveyed to the rollers, was turning steadily.

Somewhere off in the interior, among the confused mass of tanks and vats and huge receptacles that looked like immense retorts, all connected with an intricate system of pipes, came a sound of hammering.

"Good morning," said Fessenden, taking his place beside them. "I see you are getting ready for the cane."

Mr. Quintard turned to him, holding out a fragile white hand on which the purple veins stood out. With his delicately graved features, his white hair and beard, he resembled an old-fashioned New England college professor and, as Fessenden thought, seemed utterly out of place amid that confusion of machinery. Though he was dressed like a ranch foreman, the impression of the scholar persisted.

" 'The readiness is all'," he quoted, with a reminiscent smile. "We are glad to see you, Mr. Fessenden."

Grace greeted the newcomer with characteristic eagerness. Her warm handclasp always made his pulses beat faster, made his eyes fasten upon hers more boldly than a smaller man had dared.

"We were beginning to think you had fled the country," she exclaimed, laughing to hide the self-conscious flush his glance had summoned.

"I am a slave, Miss Quintard," retorted Fessenden. "I was chained to Santa Cecilia for a week, then immured for ten days at Barrancas, wrestling with contractors and supply men; and the rest of the time I have been trying to complete our bridge at Arroyo Hondo."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Quintard, a gleam of enthusiasm lighting his wistful brown eyes. "How comes the bridge?"

"Splendidly," was the reply. "We have driven the men hard. And I am confident the Barrancas & Western will not fail you this year—barring accidents, of course."

"It will be a year of years," murmured Mr. Quintard, beaming upon them both paternally.

But Grace, quick to catch the faintly ominous tone of Fessenden's conclusion, broke in thoughtfully.

"What do you mean by accidents, Mr. Fessenden? What could happen to the bridge now?"

"This is Latin America, Miss Quintard," began Fessenden. And then, seeing that her feminine intuition had detected a strange note in his suggestion, he quickly changed his manner.

"But pshaw! I am overworked and a dull pessimist. What indeed could happen now? All the bents were up last week. They are putting the second line of stringers on now, and soon the ties will be in place—and then the steel—and then a train into La Soledad!"

"And then," cried Grace, reassured, her eyes sparkling, "our sugar goes to Barrancas, and at the end of the grinding-season we go to Europe. Paris gowns, Venetian gondolas and Nile *dahabiyehs*, for a few months." She laughed excitedly. "Oh, I can hardly sleep of nights waiting for it!"

Fessenden smiled back at her.

"I'll have to get the directors of the Barrancas & Western to give me a vacation at the same time and we'll make a regular family party of it. I need a rest, too."

"You—a rest!" cried Grace mockingly. "I can see you loitering about a ruin, Mr. Fessenden. Why, you'd be bored to death."

"I shouldn't take the trip to loiter about—a ruin," said Fessenden meaningly. "And I'm sure I shouldn't be bored."

Grace turned quickly to her father, who was gazing absently into space.

"Father's on the Nile already," she said, taking his arm with an affectionate gesture. "What are you dreaming, dear?"

He patted her hand.

"I'm almost afraid to believe our good fortune," he said. "The fight has been so long and the strain so hard, particularly this last year. But—" he squared his shoulders and stood erect—"I have always kept my faith.

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It must be true now." He paused a minute and then added:

"You see, if you fail us this year, Mr. Fessenden, we are absolutely in the power of Don Malaquias Bustillo. He can dispossess us if he wishes. And I don't think he is a merciful man. A curious type, sir."

"I think he's a wily old scoundrel," declared Grace decidedly.

"Wily, certainly," said Fessenden. "But I suppose he keeps the ethics of the country. My impression is that he may be better than he looks. I've seen little of him, however."

"Come," said Mr. Quintard. "Amador can attend to the tests. Let us go to the house."

"Father can scarcely keep away from his library since he picked up an original 'El Cid' for a few pesos at Santa Cecilia a few days ago," explained Grace.

"That is a gem," said the old man with enthusiasm, stepping forward more briskly. "I must show you, Mr. Fessenden. And my new Mahabharata. You don't read Sanskrit, do you?"

"I'm afraid my reading is confined to engineers' reports," said Fessenden, smiling.

"The Mahabharata was a wild extravagance," said Grace severely. "I'm afraid, even if we escape Don Malaquias, we'll lose the plantation to the little bookseller in Santa Cecilia. Father is incorrigible."

FESSENDEN stayed to lunch and devoted most of his time to Grace. Tall, robust, full-blooded, with the good looks of good health and abounding vitality, there was perhaps a hint of coarseness in his appearance; but this was dispelled when he spoke, for his voice was smooth and well controlled.

Grace liked him. She liked his air of assured power and capability. Their tastes, moreover, touched in several matters, such as the love of outdoors, and particularly in a passion for horses.

Grace was planning to build new stables with the first surplus the railroad would bring them, and she also purposed to purchase some blooded stock with a view to breeding. Fessenden visited the stables with her and went over the new plans, giving many practical suggestions. When she was ready to purchase her stock, he said he would secure for her the services of an old Indian with a genius for horse values, who lived on the border of the Sal Si Puedes Mountains.

"He picked up for me that little thoroughbred mare I spoke to you about," said Fessenden. "She's a wonderful bit of flesh—as high-strung, sensitive and responsive as a princess, and much more beautiful than most princesses." He hesitated with a fine assumption of embarrassment.

"I wish you'd accept her." His tone was impetuous and eager. "Surely we are old friends now. Let me bring her up for you to try. Once on her back you could not resist her."

She liked Fessenden, she knew, and yet she shrank back from him whenever he became personal. She could not account for the feeling; she fought against it even. It seemed an instinctive dread of the man, as if he were a menacing figure.

He stood before her, smiling reassuringly, an almost boyish eagerness written upon his face. He seemed frank, open as the day. And yet she was not reassured. In spite of herself, suspicions of some darkly sinister design masked behind his smile persisted faintly in her mind.

"I know," she exclaimed lightly, "I should love her. And I am grateful. But if she came I should break Madrigal's heart. I can't be unfaithful to old Madrigal."

She was standing beside the stall of her pet mount, and she stepped forward and patted him on the flank. He turned his head, whinnying with pleasure, and fixed his wistful chestnut-colored eyes upon her.

"I can't bear to be tempted away from Madrigal," she said.

Fessenden desisted and shortly after took his departure.

"Remember," he admonished her, "after I have built your railroad for you, I shall expect my reward. The little family party I spoke of."

"Aren't you counting our chickens rather early?" she replied evasively.

He was stung with the consciousness that she had been evading him all day. He was not used to being held off in this fashion by women, and he was annoyed.

"Perhaps I am," he said lightly. "After all, there's many a slip—in this country. I'll drop in again and report progress."

"Please do," she said.

Half way down the avenue he turned back against his will, and she waved to him.

"Hang the minx!" he exclaimed as he rode on. "If I didn't want her——"

Meanwhile Grace turned into the house

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with a feeling of discomfort. Her inexplicable sense of some sinister quality in Fessenden returned to her, and she recalled similar suggestions after former visits.

Was there something of a threat in his last words, she wondered? No. She was morbid today. She shook off her uneasiness with an effort. Yet she liked Fessenden. He appealed to her tremendously. He was sympathetic and strong and kind. If tomorrow he should ask her—the supposition ended in an involuntary shudder.

She entered the library where her father was seated at a window placidly reading a copy of the New Testament in Greek. She put her face against his and stroked his hair.

"I like Fessenden," he said. "He is a young man of power and will. He will go far."

She kissed him without replying. Her cheeks burned.

CHAPTER V

A CUP OF COFFEE, AN AFTERNOON CALL AND SOME STARTLING NEWS

BOBBY'S life for the next few days was largely a repetition of his day of initiation. Each morning he was up at daybreak and out on the long tramp to his work. Until late afternoon he trotted about with his rod under Palmer's polite but relentless driving. After the struggle back to headquarters through the mud and a hasty dinner he would have his endless pages of meaningless figures and computations to check over until far into the night.

He went to bed utterly weary and aching from head to foot from overexertion, and apparently as soon as his head struck the pillow he was awakened and stumbled into his clothes feeling more weary than before. His existence was merely a continual physical grind, and he had no more opportunity to think than a machine.

The fourth day was Sunday, and Bobby was looking forward to that and planning a solid day of sleep. But very much to his dismay he found that the Sabbath was apparently not observed by the Barrancas & Western. The daily routine differed in no way from those that had preceded it.

On the following evening a new annoyance developed. His feet had been blistered and bruised from the first day, and now a painful open sore appeared on his left heel which made every step a torture.

The next morning it took all his nerve to limp to his work and stumble about with the rod, and it was nearly ten o'clock by the time he dragged himself into camp that night. Later Riley discovered him washing and bandaging the wounded foot.

"How long have you had that?" he asked.

"Since yesterday afternoon."

"Humph! Why didn't you say something about it?"

"Why the devil should I?" said Bobby, and looked up from his task with a grin.

Riley did not offer any sympathy, but next morning a melancholy, moth-eaten mule was brought up with the horses and Bobby was informed the beast was for him. The other three young men watched him keenly as he felt of the girth, took up a link in the curb chain and then swung into the saddle in a business-like way.

As they rode off the others held back to let Bobby go ahead. He thought it a little strange to let the youngest man in the party lead the way, but he went on, sitting flat in the saddle to the mule's rough trot, as he had been taught by the old cavalry sergeant on his father's stock farm.

"Thank heavens, Lathrop's found one greenhorn who can ride," remarked Riley to Thawn as they watched him.

On the day following the corral boy led up, instead of the mule, a fine, clean-limbed, well groomed horse.

"He'll be your regular mount," said Riley to Bobby. "But remember, if he gets a sore back you hoof it."

Also the endless strings of figures that were his evening tasks gradually diminished, and by the end of the second week, after he had helped Palmer plot up his level notes, he was free to go to bed. He had stood the test and was now an initiate.

There was a two-day interval during which his operations were shifted thirty miles back on the line to Arroyo Hondo bridge, where the overworked resident engineer had called for help from Lathrop's party.

Bobby went back there with Thawn. It seemed to him that the Brooklyn Bridge was a small affair compared with this wonderful network of beams spanning the eight-hundred-foot river bed. It was constructed of tier upon tier of hardwood timbers, laced and braced and tied into each other—timbers so hard that they would turn the point of a spike unless a hole had first been bored

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for it, and so heavy that they would sink in water like stones.

All the lumber for this construction had been cut in the forests that bordered the line of the railroad and laboriously hauled out by slow-moving oxen.

Bobby's second Sunday on the job was a grinding day at the *arroyo*. That evening he mentioned to Thawn that it had been a nice, quiet little Sabbath.

"Sunday comes now and then on this job," said Thawn. "Generally then. When there's work to do, we do it, and when we've got our work up we call it Sunday and skin down to Santa Cecilia for a little excitement, in spite of the devil and the General Manager. Here on the job there's nothing more thrilling than an occasional snakebite."

AS HE was riding home from work alone a few evenings after his return to San Juan, a sudden torrential downpour had driven Bobby to the shelter of a native shack just off the trail, about four miles from the village. He tied his horse outside and went into a dimly lighted interior where pigs, chickens and native children sprawled about in dirt and contentment.

An old woman, who was apparently deaf and dumb, indicated by signs that she would make him some coffee. While this was being prepared, two men entered the house by a back door and began an earnest conversation in Spanish in an adjoining room.

Bobby, from where he sat, could not see them, but now and then he caught a few phrases, which of course he could not understand. The term "*puente*" was repeated over and over and he also heard the word "*fuego*." This latter, he knew, meant fire; and he puzzled about the other word.

Presently one of the men came in—a fierce-looking little scoundrel with bristling mustachios. When he saw Bobby quietly sipping his coffee he started back with a volley of exclamatory Spanish that brought his companion in hurriedly. The newcomer was Fessenden's wicked-looking friend, somewhat soiled and greasy in appearance by daylight. He dismissed the other with a grunt and a gesture and addressed Bobby in voluble Spanish. Bobby merely gazed at him blankly and shook his head.

"Ah, you must pardon me," said the man in English. "You do not understand Spanish."

"Not yet," said Bobby.

"Ah," said the man with an appearance of relief. Then: "Permit me to present myself, señor. Malaquias Bustillo, at your service."

Bobby, considerably abashed by the other's courtly formality, replied with his own name. The stranger then drank a little cup of pitch-black coffee with Bobby, conversed pleasantly about the weather, comparing the tropical climate with that of New York, and made himself generally agreeable, though Bobby observed that the speckled eyes were watching him rather closely. In a few minutes the downpour passed and Bobby resumed his journey, leaving the old man still there.

That evening Bobby told Palmer of the incident. The two were plotting up their notes at the living-room table, while Riley sat on the side opposite, writing.

"You must have got into Andreas Torres's house," said Palmer thoughtfully.

"Who's he?" asked Bobby.

"Well, there are a lot of people, including the *jefe politico* and some of the other Government people, who would like very much to know exactly who he is. He lives out there and never takes the trouble to grow anything on his land, and yet he always has plenty of money when he goes to town. It's commonly believed that he is in some way tied up with the Miguelistas."

"And who are they?"

"The official encyclopedia is on the job," said Palmer in his best didactic manner. "They, my son, are a crowd of ragamuffins who have taken to themselves as a standing and perpetual vocation the little task of overturning the Government of this great and glorious Republic.

"They have never done it and probably never will, but meantime it lends dignity to horse-stealing and highway robbery, if the gentleman doing it can call himself a General or a Colonel, and euphemistically denominate the act itself as requisitioning."

"Oh, cut out that Harvard stuff!" cried Riley, with unexpected vehemence. "You make me sick."

"Possibly the English language is too complicated for your limited intelligence," retorted Palmer curtly.

"I can't work while you're spouting your confounded oratory," said Riley. "If you

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want to blow off steam, you wait till you get through and go outside. I won't stand for it here."

Bobby thought at first they were ragging each other. But he soon saw that from this trivial beginning a real quarrel was in progress. Riley leaned across the table, red-faced and panting, snapping out at Palmer, who sat back, pale and cold, launching his barbed words with deliberate effectiveness.

The truth was that the merciless pace at which the entire party was being driven was having its effect on their spirits. The combination of too much work and too little sleep, with no holidays to vary the routine, had fostered a steadily growing irritability. During the past few days verbal pleasantries had been succeeded by sharp criticisms and angry retaliations.

Thawn came in in the heat of the argument, and soon the quarrel had become a triangular affair. The trio departed severally to bed without settling the dispute, the original cause of which had been lost in the course of the wrangle that had veered to pointed personal recriminations.

All through the next day the three men scarcely spoke to one another, and Bobby's attempts to reconcile them met with curt rebuffs. That evening, as they sat glum and silent over their dinner, Lathrop rode in from Santa Cecilia.

Lathrop was one of those men whom nature has endowed with a deceptive appearance of insignificance. Narrow-shouldered, flat-chested and with a receding chin and unimpressive features, he seemed a negligible person, but his slender frame was all nerves and wires. As he walked in he seized the atmosphere at first glance.

"Is this dinner or a funeral?" he asked. "Of all the sad-faced, mournful-looking lots, you fellows are the worst I ever saw. Smile, —— you, smile!"

He took a seat at the table and by the sheer force of his own personality soon had them all talking comfortably and acting again like normal human beings. And as soon as the meal was ended and they settled down to their customary evening tasks of drafting or computing, he looked them over keenly for a few minutes and suddenly asked—

"How long since you've had a Sunday, boys?"

"Four weeks," said Riley promptly.

"Well, get out of that, then," he said. "Let's have a game of pitch. Any man who can beat me doesn't go to work tomorrow."

Whether it was because he held poor cards, or played recklessly, every one of them beat him—even Bobby, who was a novice at the game. So the following morning the chief got up and rode out to work alone while the four underlings of his party were still sleeping.

Bobby slept until noon and got up with the most luxurious feeling of leisure he had ever experienced. Riley and Palmer were chaffing each other jovially over breakfast as he appeared, and Thawn was still in bed. After the meal Bobby loafed about, smoking one of the big, fat cigars that Lathrop had brought in for them. He decided to ride over to La Soledad and renew his acquaintance with Miss Quintard.

During his fortnight at camp he had had no opportunity to see her, and in fact he had been too busy to think about her very much. But he confessed to a great curiosity.

She was rather splendid, he told himself. He wondered how any girl could be so well contented in her remote existence. He wondered what Gladys would do if circumstances marooned her in a place like La Soledad. She would undoubtedly die of *ennui*.

"I don't suppose that girl goes to a party once a year," thought Bobby, with a feeling of awe.

As he rode up the driveway, lined with towering royal palms, to the broad, rambling plantation house, he could hear the girl's voice within. She was singing, within the house, an old English melody. At the sound of his horse's hoofs she came to the door.

Her appearance rather startled Bobby for an instant. He had thought of her as rather an Amazonian figure, in business-like riding-clothes. But now he beheld a girl clothed in a soft white frock, who looked triumphantly feminine. Bobby suddenly realized that after a fortnight of hard labor with a roughneck squad in the wilderness a pretty girl in a white dress was the most beautiful sight imaginable.

Shortly afterward, as she was giving him some tea, he told her how good it had sounded to hear a girl's voice singing in English.

"I don't think Tetrazzini will be worried," she replied, laughing. "But I am very

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happy today. The bridge at Arroyo Hondo is completed and that means everything to us. If anything happened to the railroad, father would lose the plantation."

"No wonder you care about that bridge," said Bobby.

"You see, after mother died, father wanted to get out of the world. He had seen this rich country and dreamed about it. But of course when he took this plantation, ten years ago, the railroad was supposed to be a certainty within the year. But it never came. Things move haltingly in this part of the world."

"That's not my own experience with railroad work in this part of the world," declared Bobby feelingly.

"Oh, it's different now, under the new management, with Mr. Fessenden in command," she exclaimed warmly. "He's doing everything to help us. But during the past few years we've lost ground steadily, because of the difficulty of getting out our sugar, and piled up mortgage after mortgage.

"So, as far as we are concerned, the railroad is racing against ruin. In a few weeks now we begin grinding this year's crop. We must get our product running over the new road, or down we go. It's—it's terribly exciting, Mr. Worden."

"I'm not much of a financier, Miss Quintard," said Bobby, "but I should think, if you had your sugar ready, the people who hold your mortgage would give you more time, even if the railroad were delayed."

The girl laughed.

"Not the soft-footed old wretch who has his fingers about our throats. He's about as avaricious and relentless as a creditor can be, is Don Malaquias."

"Don Malaquias!" cried Bobby. "The old vulture with whiskers and speckled eyes?"

"You've seen him?" asked the girl. "Isn't he a beauty? If I were a Rembrandt, I'd paint him and pay off the mortgage on the strength of his face."

BUT Bobby did not hear her. He was trying to piece out phrases of that half remembered conversation between Fessenden and the Spaniard, which, it seemed to him now, must have boded no good to La Soledad and its mistress. Why, he wondered, was a man like Fessenden mixed up with that disreputable yellow bird of prey?

"Do you know Don Malaquias?" asked the girl.

"I—I saw him once at headquarters," stammered Bobby. "And the other day he was in a native hut where I sought shelter from a shower. I believe it was Andreas Torres's place."

"Torres!" exclaimed the girl. "His name spells trouble in this country. I wonder——"

She broke off, for a man had appeared in the doorway. Booted and spurred, he was breathing heavily from hard riding and as he stood respectfully upon the threshold he twisted his sombrero nervously in his hands.

"Señorita!" he stammered. "Señorita!"

"What is it, Amador?" she asked, arising suddenly.

The man spoke a few rapid sentences in Spanish. Again Bobby caught the words "*puente*" and "*fuego*." And then he saw Grace Quintard turn pale and clutch the table suddenly.

"What——" began Bobby.

"The bridge!" she cried, with a catch in her voice. "The Miguelistas have burned down the Arroyo Hondo bridge."

She gave some rapid orders to Amador, who bowed respectfully and disappeared.

"See here," asked Bobby. "Does *puente* mean bridge?"

"Yes," she said.

"That's what that old Greaser Malaquias was talking about with Torres," said Bobby excitedly. "They kept saying '*puente*' and '*fuego*,' and I wondered what '*puente*' meant. It's all plain as a pikestaff now."

"I can scarcely believe he would go as far as that," she faltered.

"I do," said Bobby. "Can't we get the Sheriff after the scoundrel?"

"I'm afraid we haven't much of a case. And there isn't much law in this country—not enough to catch Don Malaquias on merely inferential evidence. He's rather a big fish in Veragua."

"No," confessed Bobby. "We haven't got the goods on him—not yet."

Suddenly the girl sank into her chair and buried her face in her hands.

"Oh! Poor father!" she sobbed. "This is the end of his dream."

Awkwardly, uncomfortably, Bobby Worden watched her heaving shoulders. She was wholly feminine now, a child whose home was threatened with ruin and desolation.

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"Miss Quintard," said Bobby softly, "I'm only a tenderfoot, a tenderfoot kid; but I'm going to try to help you out of this. This greasy don is evidently set on stealing La Soledad at any cost. Maybe we can fool the old duffer yet. Can you trust me to help?"

She looked up at him quickly and her tear-stained face was illumined with a grateful smile.

"Oh, that's good of you!" she said, holding out her hand. "With the help of you and of Mr. Fessenden we may win out yet."

Bobby hesitated in some embarrassment.

"Do you know Fessenden very well?" he blurted out.

"Only through his work here," she replied. "He has done what he could to hasten the work. Both to my father and myself he has been very kind."

"I—I wouldn't trust Fessenden too much," said Bobby slowly.

"Why?" There was a startled look in her eyes.

"I suppose I shouldn't have said that," conceded Bobby. "It's just a hunch. Just keep your eye on him, that's all."

"If Mr. Fessenden is not playing fair with us, there is practically no hope," said the girl wearily.

"There's always hope," said Bobby. "I suppose I must skip back. There's a new bridge to build now, and they may send for our outfit to help. I hope they do. It would be some satisfaction to know I was helping you out."

"It's good to have a friend," she said simply as he arose.

They shook hands at the door, and she watched him ride down the curving avenue lined with palm trees.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH BOBBY EXHIBITS A LAMENTABLE LAPSE OF MEMORY

AT HEADQUARTERS Bobby found Lathrop and Riley busy at the drafting-table, working over designs for a structure to replace the burned bridge. Palmer and Thawn were packing up instruments, drafting-materials and a few necessary articles of camp equipment. Lathrop looked up for a moment as he came in.

"Get your stuff ready to move in the morning, Worden," he said. "We're going back to Arroyo Hondo. You'll have to get everything you take, including bedding, down to half a mule-pack."

As soon as he could get a word with Lathrop alone, Bobby told of the chance encounter with Don Malaquias at the house of Torres. Lathrop listened attentively.

"That's interesting," he said, "but I'm afraid you're going too strong on mere suspicion. It's only a pretty shadowy clue. Of course, I wouldn't trust old Don Malaquias any farther than I could see him; but I don't imagine why he should wish to have our bridge burned down."

"He holds a mortgage on La Soledad," said Bobby. "If they aren't able to ship out this year's crop by rail, he will be able to foreclose it and get the whole estate for next to nothing."

Lathrop whistled.

"So that's where Don Malaquias comes in, eh? I'm mighty glad you told me about this. Just at present the most important thing is to get back there and put some kind of bridge across. But I'll tell Fessenden about our friend Don Malaquias and we'll lay for him."

The next morning the entire party was on the road by daylight. The other four men went on ahead, and Bobby, being of the least importance, was detailed to stay with the pack train that carried the tents and baggage and see that it kept moving.

The heavily laden mules and the laborers on foot made speed impossible, so that it was four o'clock in the afternoon when he reached Arroyo Hondo. Palmer was waiting for them and led them to the site that had been picked out for the camp and took charge of pitching it, while Bobby went off to report to Lathrop.

"He's down the bottom somewhere," Palmer had told him. So Bobby scrambled down the high bank to the wide, dry bed, through the center of which the *arroyo* had scored for itself a deep channel.

Stretching across to the opposite bank were the remains of what only two days before had been a splendid bridge. Now, for most of its length it was nothing but a line of smoking ashes, and the few places where the work of the flames had not been complete looked like nothing but tangles of gigantic jackstraws.

Over some of these heaps of still smoking timbers men were throwing water or playing a hose that had been run out from the

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pump house on the bank, in an effort to save a few pieces of sound wood from the general wreck.

Fessenden, Lathrop, Wilson, the resident engineer, and Ed Curtis, the bridge foreman, were standing together in the mud near the channel. Lathrop looked particularly insignificant beside the other three, who were all strapping men. Wilson and Curtis were talking to him while he stood, with a slight frown on his face, chewing his cold cigar and peering about at the water brigade.

A sub-foreman waded through the muck to them, and Bobby noted it was Lathrop who gave the order that sent him floundering hastily away. A few minutes later a line of men armed with wrecking-tools scrambled down the bank and prepared to tackle part of the débris.

"Start 'em on that mess to keep 'em busy," said Lathrop pointing. "Rush that engine and derrick outfit. I want to see how much timber we can use again."

Bobby had stood aside to await the end of the conference. He had learned that a rodman was not supposed to break in on high authorities in council.

"We've lost that sugar freight for this year, anyway," said Wilson. "Lord knows how long it will be before we get across the confounded *arroyo* now. Probably months."

"Yes, this is a facer," admitted Fessenden, scowling. "We can't catch La Soledad's sugar now."

Ed Curtis, his clothes torn to ribbons, his face and hands and hair so black with soot that he resembled a negro minstrel, swore with great proficiency.

Lathrop, biting his cigar a bit more tightly, was squinting at the wreckage.

"We can't feed excuses in place of freight receipts to those bondholders," he said. To this there was no answer. Lathrop's eyes traveled slowly from bank to bank. "We can string some tracks across in time to get out that sugar," he concluded, as if dismissing a trivial detail.

The others looked at him incredulously.

"Can't be done," said Fessenden curtly.

"Why not?" asked Lathrop, making an impatient gesture. "Here it is. We'll make a cut at each bank and drop the track to the level of the river bed, carrying the last part of the drop on a trestle so we won't have to begin the cut so far back. That will save dirt work and give us a practicable grade. Then we can run across all the way on the dry bed."

"There are two channels in the bed—this one and the old one," objected Fessenden.

"Two little bridges for those. Say a dozen bents in all," continued Lathrop. "It'll work all right until the rainy season comes and floods the river bed. By that time we'll have the big bridge up again."

"There'a not much timber left in this part of the country. What are you going to build your new bridge with?" put in Wilson.

"Don't you see? As soon as the temporary track is over, we can tap all the country ahead of the *arroyo* and get our timber from there," said Lathrop impatiently.

Fessenden appeared to think.

"I'm not so sure a temporary construction will save much time," he said finally. "Anyhow, you've got to have detailed plans and bills of material for four small bridges, figures on two big cuts and an estimate of the cut and fill it will take to get your line across the bottom here. It will take you three or four days to do that."

"Six o'clock tomorrow morning," said Lathrop. "I'll have it for you then. Curtis here might lick me if I kept his gangs waiting any longer, and I'm kind of afraid of Ed. He's a big man."

Fessenden frowned thoughtfully.

"All right," he said. "Go ahead and get it up. But don't start until I've seen it all. We don't want to spend any fortunes on makeshifts the floods are going to carry away."

He turned away and walked off. Lathrop turned sharply to Wilson.

"You," he said incisively, "get down in the beds of those two channels and see if there's a footing for mud sills or whether we'll have to drive piles. I want to know this afternoon," he called to the resident engineer's retreating back.

"And I want you, Ed," he said to the burly bridge foreman, "to get me a list of every sound stick of timber in reach. The quicker the better." Then his glance rested for an instant on Bobby. "Well, son, what's your trouble?" he called to him.

"Anything for me to do?" asked Bobby.

Lathrop's keen gray eyes had already turned away from the young man and were measuring the height of the river bank. He replied without interrupting his scrutiny.

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"YES, something most important," he said. "Get some sleep. You are going to be up all night, you are going to work all day tomorrow, and then you are going to work some more and then some more.

"The only things that will have an easy time in this camp are the sleeping-hammocks. It's going to be a roughneck job. Do you realize that, young man?"

Bobby grinned.

"Yes, sir," he said. "I ain't never been to no college nohow. I can stand de gaff."

"I guess you'll do," said Lathrop. "Beat it back to camp now."

Bobby climbed the bank and as he started toward the tents he glanced back. He caught a glimpse of Lathrop, with monkey-like agility, clambering up a shaky, steaming pile of timbers of the ruined bridge to get a close look at the wreckage.

Bobby was not downcast at the prospect of the grueling work that was in store for him. He knew he would not be called on for any more than the rest, and he felt sure of his ability to keep his end up. Then, too, there was something bracing in this fight against an overwhelming calamity, that keyed him up and made him feel the way the Yale teams always do when Harvard has got the ball down under the shadow of their goal posts.

And then there was Lathrop. An inspiring leader, Lathrop, with his whimsical air of leisure and his tremendous aptitude for accomplishment.

Under his leadership there was no excitement, no scurrying about and losing of heads or tempers, and no one trying to make out that he was a hero throwing himself in the breach and working day and night from a high devotion to duty. Bobby was not in the least sleepy, but since Lathrop had ordered him to sleep, he had no thought of disobeying.

To reach his own camp he had to pass through the camp of the bridge gang, and as he went by the little office tent of the foreman he saw what drove all thought of sleep from his head. Sitting there, trim, neat and apparently perfectly at home, was Grace Quintard.

"Hello!" she called out to him. "There's nothing like a fire in the country to bring everybody out. It's as good as a church social or a funeral."

"How in the world did you get here?" he asked, as he went up to the tent.

"Well, now, how do you suppose?" she said mockingly, as she thrust out two smart little boots, spurred and mud-splattered. Then she went on more seriously. "But isn't it ghastly, though! I feel as if it really was a funeral—the funeral of poor old Soledad."

"Never say die," said Bobby cheerfully. "Lathrop thinks we'll get that sugar out yet. We start work on a temporary bridge in the morning."

"Isn't that splendid!" she cried.

"But what are you doing here?" asked Bobby. "Surely you didn't ride all this distance to see a burned bridge."

"No, I didn't. You see, just as soon as this happened, father and I knew they would want all the labor they could possibly get back here. So we got up a gang of sixty of our plantation people.

"Then father simply couldn't come, and we didn't trust old Amador to handle them alone. It's not the kind of work they like, and they might want to make trouble. But most of them will pay more attention to me than to any one else, so I just bundled my poor old maid Frieda on a horse and brought her along as chaperon, and here I am. You behold in me the foreman of Number One Emergency Gang." She laughed.

"Of course Amador is along to do the actual bossing. I'm the moral influence, that's all."

Bobby's eyes had opened wider and wider as she went on, and when she finished speaking he was staring at her in amazement.

She burst out laughing.

"Why, you are looking at me as if I were some freak," she declared. "I'm not at all. Just nothing but an ordinary girl who likes to help out when she can. I don't even want to vote, and, I assure you, I handle these peons entirely by petticoat politics.

"Now, I'll even prove to you that I haven't forgotten woman's place in the scheme of things by sewing on that button that's falling off your coat." She raised her voice and called into the next tent.

"Oh, Frieda, get me a needle and thread."

Bobby protested, but she insisted; and so he obediently sat down while she sewed on the button with a deftness that was convincingly feminine. Bobby not only waited for her to finish that operation, but stayed on until she had to remind him that he

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would probably get a cold dinner if he didn't go. She was one of the easiest girls to talk to he had ever met.

"I told Lathrop about Don Malaquias," said Bobby as he was leaving, "and he said he'd speak to Mr. Fessenden. Mr. Fessenden seems to be right on the job, and I've been thinking I was wrong in what I said to you last night."

"I hope you were mistaken," she said thoughtfully. "We're wholly dependent on him."

"I'm glad I'm going to help get that bridge across for you," said Bobby. "Though, of course, my part in the work won't be more than holding one end of a tape."

"I think you are going to do more than you give yourself credit for," she retorted. "Anyhow, you help a lot by being so encouraging and cheerful."

He walked to the camp feeling that he could work his hands off to save Grace Quintard's plantation for her. How brave and capable she was! She left a fellow in a glow somehow.

He wondered how old she might be. She seemed older than Gladys, and yet she looked no older. But there was really no point of comparison between the two. It was not fair to try to compare them—not fair to Gladys. He wondered if——Well, she seemed rather fond of Fessenden. Bobby did not relish this idea.

Fessenden might be straight, but the idea of a girl like that marrying a man of his type was intolerable. It irritated Bobby beyond measure. Though, of course, it was none of his business. "Hang Fessenden!" muttered Bobby, and felt in his pocket for a cigarette.

HIS hand closed on an unopened letter. It was from Gladys, and had been waiting for him when he got back from Soledad the night before; but in the excitement about the fire he had had no immediate opportunity to read it. Now, with a conscientious pang, he realized that he had not thought about the letter or Gladys for twenty-four hours.

Dusk was falling, but Gladys's handwriting had the merit of being easily discerned. She wrote the huge, angular scrawl that was taught as the pink of propriety at Miss Minchen's select school for young ladies on Riverside Drive.

All Miss Minchen's girls practised this tremendous chirography. It was the distinctive mark of a proper and elegant education. The unfortunate young woman whose pen moved less strikingly betrayed the stigma of some inferior school.

As Bobby opened the missive it occurred to him that Miss Minchen deserved a retainer from the Notepaper Trust. Gladys had covered four full sheets—sixteen pages—of rather large, pearl-gray notepaper. Large-size paper was for the time the proper thing in feminine circles, and pearl gray was the tint. But though Gladys had been lavish of paper, her letter comprised but a few sentences. It ran:

DEAREST BOBBY:

Isn't it *beastly* about Mr. Lessington? I stayed awake all night and cried when I got your letter. But I am so *glad* that you have got something to do, though sixty dollars a month is dreadfully small, but you'll get more very soon, won't you? Oh, Bobby, *do* discover a gold mine or something like that and hurry back. I miss you so. I'm afraid I'm going to have a perfectly *nasty* Summer. You know father had promised me a runabout all for my own. Well, now he says I can't have it. I don't exactly understand why, except that it is something to do with Steel going down and trusts being smashed all over, but I think it is pretty mean of him when I had counted on it so.

You'll give me one, won't you Bobby, when you come back to your dreadfully loving GLAD.

Bobby finished the letter with a vague feeling of disappointment. He was not the most discriminative of young men, but the idea crept into his mind that Gladys might have written a bit more sympathetically and have shown less absorption in the runabout.

But Gladys was Gladys. She was still in love with him and she missed him dreadfully, poor girl. And what more could he ask? But he sighed as he stuffed the note into his pocket and pursued his way to camp.

He found his party already beginning dinner.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH MR. FESSENDEN TWICE BEHAVES IN A STRANGE MANNER

THAT was the hardest night Bobby ever put in. Incidentally, it made him feel smaller and more inefficient than he had ever felt in his life before. Under the flickering lamp the little group sat about a drafting-table busy as beavers, drawing

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plans, preparing lists of necessary materials, making ready all the data for staking out the work.

Bobby, however, acted only a supernumerary part. He was merely entrusted with easy details, and he frankly envied the quiet efficiency with which the others tackled more complicated tasks. There were no interruptions or intermissions. Lathrop himself set the pace, doing the work of a dozen. He was at once a lightning calculator, draftsman and general supervisor of the crowd.

By daybreak the task was completed. Bobby arose from his seat with a sudden realization of a lame back and a stiff shoulder and legs that ached from long confinement in a cramped position.

"Good work, boys," said Lathrop. "Now for a quick breakfast and getting at the real job."

"How about a swim?" asked Bobby. "I noticed a bully pool in the *arroyo*."

"Can't afford it," said Lathrop curtly, absently jotting down some figures on a bit of pad, while the others looked at Bobby and laughed. Bobby blushed.

"A bath this morning would cost the Barrancas & Western about two hundred dollars, son," continued Lathrop. "Time's money on this job. We've got fifteen minutes for breakfast.

"Besides, what good engineer really needs to bathe?" he continued as they sat down at the improvised table. "Why, five years ago in the Bolivian Mountains it was so cold that when you woke up in the morning you had to get an ax to chop yourself free of your breath. We were out for ten months and not a man took a bath the whole time. Once in a while, in the heat of the day, some heroic dude would get up courage to wash his face. Then the natives would think he was crazy to waste a good meal of soap by rubbing it on his skin. But that's a matter of taste."

All through the meal he kept their minds away from the matter in hand, but as soon as the fifteen minutes were up he jumped abruptly to his feet.

"Worden, come with me to the old man's tent. The rest of you fellows begin laying off those two cuts and don't be afraid to rush it. Remember, there are three hundred men waiting for our dope."

The General Manager was getting up as Lathrop arrived at his tent with Bobby.

"Everything all ready, sir," said Lathrop cheerfully.

"Good," said Fessenden. "How does it work out?"

Lathrop explained his plans in detail. When he finished Fessenden rubbed his chin reflectively for a minute.

"Sounds all right," he observed. "What about the cost?"

"I figure about eight thousand, exclusive of track material."

"I suppose you have the estimates so I can see them?"

"Well, not exactly," said Lathrop. "The bridges, of course, are worked out in detail, but there hasn't been time to get at the dirt work, except roughly. I'm sure, though, that eight thousand is a safe figure."

Fessenden, with a frown on his face, paced to and fro in front of the tent.

"Mr. Lathrop," he said at length, "I'm sorry to say I can't authorize any work until I have your detailed estimates. I have to wire the directors in New York for a special emergency appropriation for this, and unless I can give them an engineer's estimate, I don't feel like asking them for the money."

Lathrop stepped back as if Fessenden had struck him. To hold up hundreds of workmen, to delay the whole job on a pretext that was pure red tape, was the strangest thing he had seen in all his fifteen years of railroading.

"Won't that be rather an expensive delay, sir?" he suggested quietly.

"Mr. Lathrop," said Fessenden coldly, "I am the General Manager of this job, and that is for me to decide. I shall wait for your complete estimates."

Lathrop turned on his heel and walked away without a word. He went some distance before he spoke.

"Tell Riley and the others I want to see them in camp immediately," he said curtly. And as Bobby started off he added whimsically: "By the way, Worden, you may get that swim before the week's out, after all. Time isn't of as much value on this job as I thought."

That was the only comment he made on Fessenden's ultimatum.

MEANWHILE Fessenden had his coffee and strolled over to the tent where Grace Quintard was staying with her old German maid. He found the girl seated on a fallen log sewing as placidly

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as if she were in her sitting-room at La Soledad.

"Isn't Mr. Lathrop a dear?" she cried. "Just think of them working all night over the plans, so that the work could start today."

"I'm afraid Lathrop is an enthusiast," replied Fessenden. "There are lots of things to be considered besides the mere physical task of getting the tracks across. Much as I should like to be encouraging, I don't wish to raise false hopes."

"Oh!" said the girl, thoughtfully. "And these difficulties——"

"If it only were my railroad, Miss Quintard," he said, "I could get your sugar out beyond a doubt. But unfortunately I am only a poor engineer. The sinews of war have to come from New York, and my technical impatience has to wait on the caprice of the high muckamucks who sit in soft leather chairs in some Manhattan skyscraper."

"You think there will be delay?" She was scrutinizing his face carefully as she spoke.

"I'm afraid so."

"And the chances are that you will not be able to carry our sugar?"

"I hate to confess it," he said. "But I don't think the prospect is favorable."

"Oh!" she cried again, and he could see she was fighting to keep back the tears.

"I know how hard it will be," he said gently. "I hate to see you making this fight alone."

She said nothing.

"Why don't you let me help you?" he continued. And then, with a change of tone——

"Oh, I'm sick of the whole business. Sick of being a sort of a jumping-jack with a lot of moribund old financiers pulling the strings. I ask to help you. But we could help each other. Think what we could make of La Soledad together! I could stave off Malaquias, and then we could make the place realize your father's dreams."

"Please don't talk like that," she said.

"I can't help talking like that," he persisted. "Even if I did not care for you as I do, I could not stand by idly and watch you making such a hopeless battle. Your father is failing. He is a splendid, scholarly man, but even if his health was good he has not got the practical business knowledge to help you stave off failure. And if you lose the plantation, what will become of you?"

"I don't know," she whispered. "Oh, I don't know."

"If you don't care for me now, I will make you care for me," he said. "I love you enough to make you love me."

"Please——" she protested.

"I know you are young," he said gently. "You are timid and afraid, and that makes you all the more lovable. But think of your father. Think what our marriage would mean to him. Oughtn't you to think less of your own fears and more of his need?"

She looked away from him, offering no word.

"Surely you believe I mean it, don't you?" he said.

Suddenly she glanced up at him with shining eyes.

"Yes, I think you do," she responded. "You are very kind. And perhaps I appreciate it more than I am able to show." She paused a moment.

"But—but I want to test your kindness. Don't ask me anything now, please. But let Mr. Lathrop go ahead with his plans. Build the road to La Soledad in time for our sugar, Mr. Fessenden. You can do it, surely, on your own responsibility. And then come to see me at the plantation and we'll—we'll talk things over. Won't you, Mr. Fessenden—for me?"

Fessenden felt his pulses beating faster, but he looked at her warily.

"It would probably mean the loss of my position," he said. "There'd be a new General Manager, and I might not be able to complete the job for you at that."

"I think you underrate your importance to the road," she protested. "They could not afford to lose you. And if you want to help us, you might try."

She had risen from the log now. Her sewing had dropped to her feet unheeded, while she looked eagerly into his eyes.

"I'll chance it," he said; and added significantly, "for you."

As she was stammering her thanks he suddenly seized her hand and kissed it again and again.

"Oh, please, don't spoil it all," she gasped, taken by surprise.

She got free suddenly and stood away from him, flushing with shame.

"Thank you again. I must go to Frieda now," she said, and moved toward the tent.

Fessenden walked away with a sense of

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irritation. He wondered if she had been playing him. And within the tent, while the hot blushes coursed over her face, Grace vigorously washed with soap and water the hand his lips had touched.

CHAPTER VIII

BOBBY IS LEFT BEHIND WITH A HEAVY RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP HIM COMPANY

FESSENDEN appeared the next morning at Lathrop's tent a few minutes after breakfast. Lathrop was bending over some papers with Bobby; the rest of the party had been sent out to stake out excavations for the footings of the temporary bridges.

None of them had taken any rest for the last forty-eight hours, for after Fessenden's strange instructions to Lathrop they knew that until their work was finished to the last detail not a shovelful of earth would be moved and three hundred men would stay idle; there would be a stoppage of the whole intricate enterprise that stretched from New York to the ripening cane fields of La Soledad. In Lathrop's words, the game was gummed unless they could hump.

"Mr. Lathrop," said Fessenden, as he stepped into the tent, "I'm sorry to call you off this job, but I've got a cable ordering you and your party to leave for Jucaro immediately. The directors want the location run in over there at the other end of the line so they can have exact data on the cost to complete everything. That leaves us rather in the lurch here, but there's no way out of it. You can leave one man behind—I'll take the responsibility for that—and we'll finish those estimates as best we can."

While Fessenden was speaking Lathrop was gathering up the loose sheets of paper covered with closely written figures that were scattered over the drafting-board.

"That's all right, Mr. Fessenden," he said cheerfully, sorting them over.

"It seems a bothersome delay, I know," said Fessenden.

"Not necessarily," said Lathrop, folding the papers together.

For the first time he turned his face toward Fessenden. It was haggard from two nights of sleepless toil and covered with a stubby red growth that clamored for the razor. But in his eyes shone a triumphant glitter.

"I think you'll find everything there, sir," he said quietly. "It's all complete. We can pack and be on the road within an hour, and we can catch the afternoon work train to Barrancas."

Fessenden's expression, as he took the papers, was a curious one. Bobby thought he seemed chagrined, but it may have been merely astonishment. For a minute he simply stared at the little packet, and then he began glancing over the papers, puckering his lips at the long lines of figures.

There was no getting away from that closely packed array. Lathrop and his men had put in all the previous day in the field staking out lines, leveling, measuring, setting cross-section stakes and laying out borrows; then through the night with the exception of an hour or so of sleep toward daybreak they had been feverishly figuring, computing, checking, and rechecking. Every yard of excavation, every stick of timber, every bolt and spike had been carefully detailed, and the cost of each item accurately figured.

In his perusal Fessenden's eye caught a blue tinge in the writing, and he noticed that in a few places the words or figures had run, as from a copy press.

"You have copied these?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes," said Lathrop. "I have taken a press copy of everything. The originals are for you."

Fessenden tucked the estimates away in his pocket.

"I suppose you can go ahead," he concluded. "Bring Wilson to my tent for instructions."

"I'll start the dirt work," said Lathrop.

"Very well," concluded Fessenden as he left the tent.

Since Fessenden's first words, Bobby had listened to the pair in a daze. Sending Lathrop away, it seemed to him, must surely result in a long delay in the work, and in the face of the consequent catastrophe that threatened La Soledad, he could not understand Lathrop's air of cheerfulness.

Besides, Bobby suddenly discovered that he was reluctant to go to Jucaro. An enforced desertion of Grace Quintard in this crisis was repugnant to him. He wanted—in quite a disinterested way, of course—to help her. And he had expected to help her, though his plans had no more definite shape

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than the vague notion of punching don Malaquias's classic countenance. He disliked leaving her alone to Fessenden's protection.

Lathrop, gathering up his papers, was humming contentedly—as if he had "put something over," Bobby thought—and the young man questioned him almost reproachfully.

"Won't the job be gummed up for keeps if you and the rest of us have to go away?"

"It would if we hadn't stuck those estimates together—and made our own copies," replied Lathrop. "Wilson can handle the thing now—with Curtis and one of us to help him. Now come with me."

He led the way on a run to a clearing near the river bank. Grace Quintard stood there, talking to Riley. Near by the watchful Amador sat on a stump smoking cigarettes. And strung along the lines of stakes that marked the future excavation were groups of black and yellow laborers, squatting or lying on the earth, with picks and shovels stacked near them.

"All right!" cried Lathrop, as he came up.

Immediately Grace Quintard clapped her hands. Amador tossed away his cigarette and gave some orders in guttural Spanish that brought the laborers to their feet. Immediately Riley took up a pick and loosened some clay, and then handed a brand new shovel to Miss Quintard.

She pressed a slender foot against the iron, pushed it vigorously into the earth, and flung out the first shovelful. Bobby tossed up his hat with a loud hurrah, and at a wave of Amador's hand the laborers—they were all La Soledad men at this point—with grins of pride and appreciation at this little ceremony, jumped to the work with a will and the dirt began to fly.

"Moving-picture stuff," grunted Lathrop with supreme scorn, but nobody heard him.

"Mr. Lathrop, you're splendid!" exclaimed Grace. "If every one had your spirit, I'd feel sure the construction would be finished in time."

"If I could get a bunch of laborers like you, Miss Quintard," returned Lathrop grinning, "I could build a railroad to the moon."

"I don't know about the moon," whispered Ed Curtis to Palmer, "but little Lathrop there could build a railroad to —— and back if he wanted to—and he could do it with tailor's dummies for labor."

IMMEDIATELY after these amenities Lathrop sent Bobby to find Wilson with an abruptness that made that young man speculate savagely on his chief's eligibility as a suitor for Grace Quintard's hand. He wanted to be the man to stay with Wilson, but he was afraid to ask, and he assumed that Lathrop would leave one of his more experienced assistants.

When Lathrop returned with Wilson from a conference at Mr. Fessenden's tent, he was talking rapidly to the engineer.

"Now, the first thing, as I explained to the old man," he was saying, "is to get the track to the *arroyo* so you can rush that material up from Barrancas. The track gang is still eight miles back, and the rail head should be pushed to the river in a hurry."

The pair, as he was speaking, paused at Lathrop's tent, where Bobby had been sent to gather the kits together.

"I'll be out to look things over before we start," concluded Lathrop. "Send in the rest of my boys to pack up. I'll leave Worden to help you."

While Bobby's ears were tingling with this unexpected announcement, Lathrop entered the tent.

Lathrop, without a word to Bobby, went to his pack, took out a shaving-kit, hung a little hand mirror up on a nail, and began lathering his stubby growth of beard. Presently, through a foam of suds, with his back toward Bobby, he began to talk in a sort of monotone.

"Nice girl, that Miss Quintard," he said unexpectedly. "Reminds me of a big Portuguese sub-foreman I had down in Sao Paulo three years ago. He got an idea into his yellow coco that I'd cheated him out of two milreis on his pay envelope, and he came at me red-eyed with a gun."

Scrape, scrape went Lathrop's razor.

"Hang cold water!" he interpolated cheerfully. "Wish I'd brought a valet."

"I stunned him by calling him a gentleman, and before he recovered, I smashed his head with a spike maul," continued Lathrop, feeling the side of his face solicitously. "But you can't do that to Miss Quintard when she comes at you with her eyes."

Scrape, scrape.

Bobby began to feel rather indignantly that Lathrop was taking liberties.

"I wanted to leave Thawn here," con-

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tinued Lathrop, "but Miss Quintard got the drop on me with a pair of violets and said it must be you. So I threw up my hands." *Scrape, scrape.* "I suppose you can use your own eyes, son?"

Bobby was aware that Lathrop was now eying him keenly in the glass, though the monotonous *scrape, scrape* of the razor went on as steadily as ever.

"I think so," said Bobby.

"Keep 'em wide open on the job, and don't be looking at Miss Quintard all the time," admonished Lathrop, as he gave a final stroke at his chin.

He poured some water from a pail into a tin basin and vigorously scrubbed his face. Then, while mopping off the watery suds with a questionable-looking towel, he turned toward Bobby.

"Worden," he said seriously, "there's something queer about this job. Unless I'm greatly mistaken, there will be a curious lot of accidents and delays, which will begin as soon as I am gone. I'm trusting you to try and get to the bottom of them. I told Fessenden about old Malaquias, but he insisted there was nothing in it."

He wiped his razor carefully and put it away.

"But, Mr. Lathrop——" interjected young Worden.

"Never mind that," said Lathrop. "But nail this on the head. If things come to a point where you are dead sure you have got the goods on any one, no matter who, send a cable to this address."

He gave Bobby a piece of paper containing a cryptographic cable direction in which the only thing intelligible to the young man was the word "New York."

"Say 'Come at once' and sign my name," continued Lathrop. "And then try to get a message to me. But don't go off at half cock."

Riley, Thawn and Palmer came leading their horses up from the corral, and there was a hurried interval of packing, during which Lathrop said no more to Bobby. Then they all bade him good-by and mounted.

"Eyes open, son," said Lathrop as he settled himself in his saddle. "Eyes open, and take care of everything, including yourself."

Bobby watched them until they disappeared among the trees, and then, with a sharp pang of loneliness, went off to report to Wilson.

CHAPTER IX

BOBBY GIVES AWAY A MATCH AND MEETS ONE

SWINGING a machete all day long in a field of tangled sugar cane is heart-breaking work. The long, heavy stalks, topped by the waving ribbon-like leaves, grow high enough to cut off any cooling breeze that might spring up, but they let the sun beat down on the cane cutter with undiminished vigor.

From time to time he is showered with the needle-like fuzz of a little parasitical vine he calls *pica pica*, a name that, though appropriately descriptive, yet lacks adequacy. "Prick, prick," it means in English, but the word should be repeated a hundred times instead of only once.

Still, such is human perversity that the field laborer looks upon this work as infinitely superior, and worthier of a *caballero* than the more humble and less arduous shoveling of dirt. The cynically inclined might perhaps find the reason for this in the fact that in the latter case he is more constantly under the eye of his foreman, and the necessary and proper intervals of rest and recuperation are more certainly seen and noted.

But whatever the explanation, the fact remains. And it was this fact that was creating sad discontent among the sixty men that had been brought down to the work from La Soledad.

Resenting the indignity of their new employment, they became sullen and quarrelsome; and worse yet, they began to loaf openly and without shame, until old Amador's temper was tested to the breaking-point and his vocabulary put to a cruel strain.

Against Grace's advice the railroad company had increased their wages fifty per cent., with an effect opposite to that intended. The men became more disinclined than ever to work steadily. No one but a fool, they reasoned, works six days in the week when he can earn his accustomed wage in four.

On the third day Amador marched to and fro along the edge of the cut where they were working, twirling his fierce mustachios and swearing volubly at the scowling men who were dabbing listlessly at the earth with their picks or throwing inadequate shovelfuls into the barrows which other workers wheeled away at a leisurely walk. Whenever the old foreman turned away from a

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group they rested on their tools and whispered together, glancing ominously at his back.

While this was going on, Grace and Bobby came up to observe the progress of the work and Amador immediately shut off his ineffective tirade and began, in explanatory staccato, to pour his troubles into Grace's ears. The men, he thought, were preparing to make trouble, and as Grace and Bobby took in their sullen glances and inert movements they believed he might be right.

Directly in front of them a group of fifteen or twenty men had frankly stopped working and were apparently listening to their conversation and awaiting its outcome. Grace suddenly whirled toward these and motioned to them.

"Come up here!" she called in Spanish.

The men, taken by surprise, hesitated a moment and then obeyed, scrambling up out of the shallow cut and grouping themselves in front of the girl. She began talking to them in rapid Spanish, gesticulating with hands, arms and shoulders, even punctuating her talk with taps of her foot, while her eyes snapped and sparkled.

Soon the men began to look uncomfortable. They shifted about uneasily and would not meet her eyes. Then she concentrated her remarks on one old fellow with a gray mustache, who seemed to be a shade more sullen and mutinous than the rest. In a moment the others began to smile covertly, and then broke into open laughter.

The one who laughed the loudest was a tall, handsome youth with big melting black eyes who stood at the back of the group. Instantly Grace directed her attention to him, and at her opening remark the others promptly turned around and guffawed with glee, while the youth himself immediately ceased his merriment and looked as if he would like to turn and run. Then she terminated the lecture with a look, a gesture, and a vigorous sentence that included them all.

They slid down the bank into the cut and began to work, still chuckling to themsleves and casting amused looks at the two men who received special attention. The picks swung with more vim, the shovels threw the dirt in the barrows faster, and the men who wheeled the barrows quickened their pace.

Grace turned to Bobby.

"Come along," she said. "We mustn't discourage their reformation by seeming to be suspicious of it."

"But how in the world did you do it?" he asked, as they walked away.

"Quite simply," she replied. "They are as easy to handle as children when you know them. First I told them how they were disgracing themselves, their country and its sacred flag, our plantation, and finally and most importantly, how they were making me hang my head in shame. Then I picked out the two worst and made fun of them. I told the old fellow that I would tell his wife on him, and she would feed him on cold coffee and burnt *tortillas* for the next month.

"It happens he really is afraid of her, so that made a hit with the rest of them. Then I got the young one, who fancies himself a great beau, by threatening to tell all the girls what a good for nothing he really is and forbidding them to dance with him at the *bailes*. Petticoat influence is a great thing, if you know how to use it."

"I should say so," said Bobby as he looked back for a moment at the hustling peons.

THE two had been much together since Lathrop left for Jucaro. Bobby had found himself with plenty of spare time on his hands, and in those intervals when he was not watching the work, making friends with the construction foremen, soaking in the pick-and-shovel side of railroad-building, he had had many opportunities to seek Grace's society.

In fact, he blundered into many of Fessenden's *tête-à-têtes* with a pertinacity that the General Manager thought presumptuous. Had Bobby been more experienced in the etiquette of such work, he would never have had the temerity to place himself in a position of social rivalry to Fessenden. But personally he had no sense of being Fessenden's inferior. He was not accustomed to being an inferior.

So, whether he made a third or Fessenden made a third, Bobby never retired from the field. And as for Grace, it appeared to Fessenden that she encouraged the cub's presence in order to avoid being alone with him. In this the General Manager was right. The girl was afraid of Fessenden now.

Old Mr. Quintard, who had come down the day after Grace arrived, was ineffective

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as a buffer against the Manager's attentions, because he frankly liked the man and believed in him, and so saw no reason why his intimacy with Miss Quintard should give cause for worry. And since Grace on her part dreaded the explanation of facts and feelings of which she herself was not yet certain, the old gentleman, ignorant of his daughter's state of mind, encouraged rather than rebuffed Fessenden.

So, when it was decided the same afternoon as that on which she had quelled the incipient mutiny that they should both go back to La Soledad and leave the men in charge of Amador, Grace felt very much relieved.

Meanwhile the work progressed smoothly. The two big cuts were well opened up, the grading along the river bottom was making good progress, and such timber as had been saved from the burned bridge was being shaped up ready for use in the temporary structures; while from the track-camp word was received that the rails were being pushed toward the *arroyo* at the rate of three quarters of a mile a day.

This meant that the rest of the bridge material could soon be brought from Barrancas. Fessenden, just before he left on a trip to Barrancas, had altered Lathrop's plans so as to call for less cutting and more trestle work at the two banks, thus making the work now more than ever dependent on getting the track built to the river.

After he saw Grace off, Bobby repaired to Curtis's office tent to find the bridge foreman and his timekeeper engaged in a competitive trial of profanity. It was a contest between two masters, and Bobby, awed by the depth, breadth and fluency of their language, dared not interrupt. Finally, when the sulfurous smoke had cleared away, he ventured to ask what had gone wrong.

"Nothing at all! Oh, nothing at all!" said Curtis with profound sarcasm. "The whole job is on the blink, that's all. Some blankety-blank native foreman burned out the blankety-blank track gang's blankety-blank locomotive. That's all! Lord knows how long it will take to fix her, and meanwhile there'll be no more blankety-blank track laid."

He trailed off into Spanish, as affording a wider opportunity for lurid emphasis than his native tongue.

"Can't they use the other engine?" asked Bobby.

"No. She's too heavy to run on the track out here."

"How did it happen?"

"Well, it seems they just got a new fireman last night. Some fellow that rolled in here and wanted to fire the engine on the pile driver. I couldn't give it to him, so I sent him back to the track camp, and they put him on as night fireman.

"He had a note from old Don Malaquias asking us to give him a job. I suppose that's why they took him on. Well, that fireman is fired now all right and I hope he ——" and he dilated in two languages on the eternal future of the fireman.

"Mr. Curtis," said Bobby seriously, "if I were you, I'd kick into the river any man who came from Don Malaquias Bustillo looking for a job."

"Good dope," commended Curtis, with further volcanic embellishments.

Bobby was startled by this new catastrophe. There was no proof that the "accident" had been deliberately planned by Bustillo, but he felt sure it had been. The worst of it was that this sort of thing might be repeated with infinite variations. When Fessenden came back from Barrancas, late in the afternoon, Bobby decided to put the occurrence squarely up to him.

Fessenden received him cordially.

"I have learned something about that accident to the track engine that I think you ought to know," said Bobby.

"Most important, doubtless," said Fessenden blandly. "What do you know?"

Bobby told him.

"You didn't believe that Don Malaquias had a hand in burning the bridge," he concluded. "But surely this incident makes it more plausible."

Fessenden did not reply immediately and Bobby thought he had made an impression. But when the General Manager finally spoke both words and manner immediately dispelled that idea.

"If you're going to stay on this job, young man, you've got to get out of your head the idea that you are an amateur detective. Your job is to do exactly what Mr. Wilson tells you—nothing more. As for prying about and imagining a lot of cock-and-bull stories about a man like Don Malaquias, why, if I catch you at it again, I'll fire you. That's all."

It was a brutal and unjustified rebuke and Bobby knew it. But he held back the hot

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reply that rose to his lips and turned away.

Later, as his rage subsided, his amazement at Fessenden's attitude grew and his suspicions of the General Manager increased. And yet it seemed wildly improbable that a man of Fessenden's standing would risk his high position by becoming involved in a scoundrelly plot.

He was a big man and Bobby knew that he drew a princely salary for managing not only the railroad construction but a whole chain of allied interests that were controlled by the same capital. Even if he were a rogue, he would have to be a fool as well to risk his standing by mixing himself in such underhanded doings; and fools are not likely to rise to the position that Fessenden held. The thread of the thing was too involved for Bobby to trace.

He hurriedly wrote a mournful letter to Grace Quintard telling her of this latest setback, and then went off to report to Wilson.

Later in the day, Bobby was given another cud of reflection to chew. Wilson, who when relieved from forced draft was not unduly energetic, began to complain of the amount of work he had to do.

"And do you know," he said, "to make it worse, just this morning the old man was asking if I couldn't spare you. Said that Lathrop would be needing you and that he wanted to send you around to him. Well, I just cussed him out, and told him I had to keep you."

Bobby had a vivid picture of the "cussing out" that Fessenden had received. But his amusement evaporated as he realized the significance of what Wilson told him. Fessenden wanted to get him away, where, even if he were not impressed by the warning he had received, there would be no possible chance for him to play detective. Why?

IT WAS the following afternoon that Wilson gladdened Bobby's heart by sending him out alone to do a more important piece of work than any that had so far been entrusted to him. He told him to get to a point two miles beyond the *arroyo* and run levels over a certain section of finished grading to see if it had been properly done.

Bobby went to the task in high spirits. When he had finished he sent his negro rodman back, while he stopped to see the foreman of the grading-camp that had the work in charge and gave him some notes of a few places that had not been brought up to the required grade. Then he started back alone.

In spite of the puzzling delays his spirits were high. He had done a good day's work. He felt that he had, so to speak, "made the team." He was a regular now. And as he walked along the finished dump that stretched like a great yellow gash through the jungle, he thought how fine it was to be there, doing his little part toward helping the march of civilization, being one of the pioneers who were bringing this rich domain under the sway of man.

Half way back to camp he left the right of way to take a dark, narrow trail leading across a deep *arroyo*, as yet unbridged. Near the bottom of this a dour-looking native was sitting on a tree trunk. As Bobby came up the man got to his feet and, with characteristically elaborate politeness, importuned the señor for a match.

Bobby felt in his pockets to get it. As he did so he heard a branch snap behind him. As he was about to turn, a heavy cloth was thrown over his head from behind, his arms were pinioned and the man in front of him dropped down suddenly and clasped him around the knees with a grip of iron.

Before he had a chance to struggle or cry out he was helpless.

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH MISS QUINTARD HAS HER HANDS FULL

AT LA SOLEDAD, after the return of the Quintards, things were not going well. During their absence some rascals had broken into a storehouse in the night and stolen a big store of provisions. Rodriguez, the mill foreman, who had been left in charge, was unable to get any clue to the looters.

About a dozen of the field hands, he also reported, had gone off with bundles of their personal belongings, and vanished down the trail toward Santa Cecilia. No explanation was forthcoming for this defection. Rodriguez vaguely suggested the influence of the Miguelistas. He appeared to be greatly troubled and Grace suspected that he knew more than he was willing to tell. With sixty of their men at Arroyo Hondo and their cane almost full grown, they could ill afford to lose any hands.

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The day after the Quintards got home old Mr. Quintard, who had caught a cold during the stay at the Arroyo Hondo camp, was compelled to keep to his bed. He had considerable fever and would eat nothing. Probably his keen anxiety about his affairs made him worse. Grace was worried. She sent for the local doctor at San Juan—in whose simple skill she had little faith—only to find that he had gone to Santa Cecilia.

That afternoon an additional force of some forty workers was due to arrive from Santa Cecilia along with the pack train bearing the payroll money. But neither laborers nor money arrived. Late in the evening Grace learned that the pack train had been successfully held up this time and the bandits had made off with the loot. As for the squad of laborers, they had got only as far as Trinidad. Here a few rough-looking men, who were loafing about the railroad terminus, had mingled with them; and subsequently they refused to come farther.

Grace realized, in the face of these unexpected misfortunes, with her father ill in bed, that she needed Amador badly. But at the same time she dared not summon him from Arroyo Hondo, where his presence was necessary if the squad of La Soledad men was to be kept at work. The bridge, after all, was the paramount thing. She could get along at La Soledad somehow.

She tried to keep from her father the news of the hold-up, but he became suspicious and the truth slipped out. He was terribly excited and tried to get up, but the effort was too much for him. He collapsed in her arms. And later the fever increased alarmingly.

The next night the first of the cane fires occurred.

Grace was sitting in her father's bedroom. He was tossing restlessly on the bed, muttering incoherently, for he was slightly delirious with fever. A single candle, shielded from the sick man's eyes by a screen, was the only light in the room.

Grace had been leaning back in the chair with closed eyes, for she was very weary. On the previous night she had watched by the bedside until dawn, when Frieda drove her away to snatch a brief sleep. Fearful now lest she succumb to slumber, she got up, washed her face and stood for a few minutes by the window, breathing deeply of the fresh night air.

Far over the cane fields she noticed a little glow of light. At first it seemed no bigger than a lantern. But the flame was less constant, for it waxed, wavered, vanished and then leaped into sight again. Presently it had become much larger and Grace could see threads of flame spreading out from the parent glow. Then she knew what it was.

Quietly, without disturbing or alarming the invalid, she walked out of the room and closed the door behind her. In the patio she found a servant, whom she sent off to notify Rodriguez. Then she hurried to Frieda's room.

"I want you to stay with father, Frieda," she said. "There's a fire in the cane!"

"*Madre de Gott!*" exclaimed Frieda, becoming polyglot in her excitement, and fainted as promptly and properly as an eighteenth-century lady.

Grace, chafing over this feminine delay, dashed water in the maid's face, and as soon as she was revived despatched her to the stables to have a horse saddled immediately. Then she ran to her own room, tore off her house dress and got into her outdoor clothes. When the frightened maid returned, Grace was waiting, booted and spurred, at the house door. Presently a boy brought her horse. As she leaped into the saddle, the big alarm bell at the sugar mill began its clamor. The fire made a considerable glow now. From beyond the stables Grace could hear excited voices calling and the sound of men running.

Putting spurs to her beast she cut across a meadow. In the darkness people were hurrying from all directions. They were pouring across the field chattering, exclaiming, shouting to one another. The darkness multiplied their number until they seemed a regiment, an army. Grace found she must pull in her horse to a walk for fear of running some one down.

Canefields are planted checkerboard fashion, with broad cleared spaces between the squares to serve as fire ditches, for a fire sweeps through the ripened cane like a wild thing. Grace turned from the meadow into one of these cleared avenues and urged her horse toward the glow.

THE fire had started at the edge of one of the squares and, urged by a gentle breeze from the south, was eating its way diagonally across, and spreading out at the head, mushroom fashion. In

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the tangle of stalks it blazed fiercely and the crackling of the flames sounded like the rattle of a machine gun.

As Grace came up she saw Rodriguez in the midst of the square, in advance of the line of fire, marshaling his men in a long line. They were clearing with their machetes a space to stay the march of the fire. Every minute recruits were pouring in and taking their places in the working line. Rodriguez, a giant of a man, his chest and arms bare, towered above the others as he strode to and fro along the line urging the men to their work. He was not so competent a captain as Amador, but in the latter's absence he seemed to have risen to the occasion and—Grace was fervently thankful for this—he was apparently sober.

Grace took this in while she wrestled with her horse, which was nearly frantic at the noise and confusion and the sight of the bright, dancing fire demon. His desire to bolt carried her a considerable distance back along the avenue before she subdued him, and spying one of the stable boys, leaped to the ground and turned the mount over to him.

Then she made her way on foot toward the line of men who were slashing wildly at the intermeshed cane stalks. Before them the writhing walls of flame rose high in the air. The fire glittered upon their flying machetes and gleamed upon bare backs and arms.

Already, from the slowly widening clear space they had made, Rodriguez was preparing to start a back fire to check the advancing conflagration and hurl it back upon itself. The flames were now very close, but he calculcated there would just be time for this maneuver, which would save a good part of the cane in the square.

His plan, however, was doomed to disaster. Unexpectedly a fresh slant of wind came rustling over the fields and, with a startling suddenness, the fire dragon leaped forward, roaring and shaking its mane of flames. It hurled itself to the edge of the inadequately cleared space, breathing blasts of scorching heat, and drove back the line of defenders, gasping for breath, in confusion and dismay. The monster was aroused now and could not be faced at close quarters.

In the avenue between the squares Grace and Rodriguez rallied their broken lines and set the men at work along the edge of the farther square, widening the cleared space so that the flames could not bridge the gap when they reached it. Here, while the roaring wall of flame drew steadily nearer, the men plied their machetes at panic speed, amidst a burning heat, each half hidden from his neighbor in swirling clouds of smoke, while the conflagration roared in their ears with the din of an artillery battle.

A rain of sparks was falling in the square they were trying to save. In it, here and there, little fires sprang up, and squads of men were kept hustling about beating this out with improvised cane-stalk besoms. Grace herself took one of these and worked like a common laborer.

"Go back, señorita; it is too hot here," protested Rodriguez.

"The men will work better if they see me," she replied quietly.

Here and there she had noticed a laborer slinking off. One, almost within reach of her hand, dropped his broom suddenly and fled screaming. She tried to call to them, to exhort them, but the roar of the flames drowned her voice, the smoke choked her, and when she opened her mouth the heat seared her tongue like a hot iron.

"Faster! Faster!" cried Rodriguez to his wavering line, himself doing the work of three men. "*¡Córtale, muchachos! ¡Córtale, por amor de Dios!*" He, at least, was keeping his nerve.

Meanwhile the fire, burning more fiercely every instant, advanced closer and closer to the avenue. It hung poised over the open space like a huge wave about to break and overwhelm them. They were working in an inferno. Stalks on the other square began to shrivel and crack. In several places at once the fire started among them.

In spite of their best efforts the defenders were being driven back. Men were gasping and whimpering hysterically while they glanced behind them, as they worked, with faces of terror. It seemed as if the square must go, as if the conflagration must sweep over the whole plantation. Grace saw Rodriguez look back helplesssly. His body was steaming with the heat. She felt they were beaten. She could stand no more, and she could not bear to keep the men at their task.

"Back! Back!" she cried. But even her own ears could not catch the words.

And then suddenly the menacing wave of fire seemed to crumble and fall back on

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itself. The heat fell away a bit, and they could breathe again. Rodriguez urged the men to renewed efforts and in a short time it was apparent that the worst was over. The fire was confined to its original square, and even some of that might be saved. Presently a squad of machete men was shifted for this purpose to a new line of defense.

Not until the fire was unquestionably under control did Grace leave. When she told Rodriguez she was going, he knelt suddenly, in view of the men and kissed her hand.

"*Bendita sea la madre que te parió,*" ("Blessed be the mother that bore you"), he exclaimed, and his rough voice was shaken.

Grace, as she rode homeward, in a sudden reaction from the excitement felt thoroughly exhausted and on the verge of hysterics. It was with difficulty that she restrained herself from crying aloud. But as she rode she grew calmer.

The fire had come as a sort of climax to the misfortunes that seemed crowding about her. Fire is the bogy of the cane planter. He takes the most stringent precautions to protect his fields from it. The ripening cane is closely guarded, and any one caught smoking in or near the tangle of inflammable stalks is certain to be roughly handled. At La Soledad every care had been taken to guard against a conflagration.

How had the thing started? Was it an accident, or—and this was the startling possibility that fretted at Grace's mind—had the fire been laid deliberately? Grace puzzled over the affair, and the more she thought about it the more she feared that some subtle enemy had planned the blaze. But why?

At the house Grace was astonished at Frieda's loud exclamations of concern, until her mirror revealed the cause. Her clothes were torn and burned in several places, her face and hair blackened and smudged with soot. She laughed at the tatterdemalion picture in the glass.

Fortunately her father had fallen into an untroubled sleep, so she was able to get some rest for at least part of the night.

THE loss of the payroll money was a heavy embarrassment. Grace took prompt action to have her bankers at Santa Cecilia ship her another consignment of money from the sadly depleted account, but meanwhile news of the hold-up spread about, and the prospective delay seemed to create a feeling of sullen dissatisfaction among the laborers. There were more desertions.

Moreover, Rodriguez found two men actually smoking cigarettes in the sugar mill, in the face of all regulations. Such a thing had never been heard of before. Their punishment was summary. Rodriguez was carrying a piece of leather harness, which he immediately used as a bastinado and beat them unmercifully.

They made such an uproar that Grace ran over to see what the trouble was. She called off Rodriguez. The luckless pair were allowed to collect their belongings, and Rodriguez escorted them down the road leading toward Santa Cecilia and told them that if he ever caught them lurking about the plantation again he would show them what a real beating was.

In this time of stress a visit from Don Malaquias was not reassuring Grace cherished an instinctive dislike for the banker, and was inclined to look upon him as a bird of ill omen.

On this occasion he was particularly suave and polite. The time was drawing near when, unless the fortunes of the Quintards took a decided turn for the better, he could take possession of La Soledad. But to this impending foreclosure Don Malaquias did not refer. His visit was prompted, he declared, by a friendly solicitude concerning Mr. Quintard's health. Men of Mr. Quintard's culture and breadth and moral probity were unfortunately rare in that part of the world, he declared. Also, they were unappreciated.

He touched on a prejudice, "among the ignorant classes," against Americans, which unfortunately seemed to be growing. Several times in the course of his visit he reverted to this prejudice, gently deplored the fact, and passed to other topics.

The scarcity of money he also mentioned. Veragua, it appeared, was passing through a financial stringency. Interest rates had soared to record heights. Don Malaquias spoke in quite an impersonal way, but he made it plain that the Quintards could hope for no farther extensions from him.

A few minutes after he had taken his departure Grace happened to glance out of a window. A short way down the drive, she noticed, Don Malaquias had reined in his

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little native pony and sat in the saddle gazing about him with an air of proprietorship that annoyed Grace exceedingly. He appeared to be taking a long, ocular appraisal of the place. Finally he turned his horse's head and rode off toward San Juan. Grace would have been astonished to know that he had dinner with Fessenden at Lathrop's old headquarters in the village and that the pair were closeted together, talking in low tones, until late in the evening.

The girl had been anticipating Fessenden's appearance with dread. A few weeks before, had similar troubles arisen on the plantation, she would have written him without hesitation, asking for his advice and aid. But now, badly as she needed a man's advice, she could not appeal to Fessenden. She was afraid of him.

From Bobby, immediately after her return, she had received a note telling of the accident to the track engine. She had replied, asking him to keep her posted about the progress of the work at Arroyo Hondo, but since then she had received no word from him. She was beginning to feel a bit hurt at his seeming neglect. She wanted to let him know of her troubles; she felt that she must let some one know; and yet, if he was not interested, she did not wish to impose her affairs upon him.

Still, her instinct told her that Bobby could be trusted. He might have been too busy to answer her note. Or perhaps he had sent her a letter that had gone astray.

That night a farther development in the situation at La Soledad made her decide to write. It was another fire in the cane fields. Fortunately one of the laborers discovered it before it got fairly started, and he immediately gave the alarm, so it was extinguished before much damage had been done.

But the laborer, it appeared, just before coming upon the fire had noticed the figures of two men stealing rapidly away from the place. Examined by Grace and Rodriguez, he said he had not been close enough to distinguish their features. They had loomed up suddenly ahead of him, like shadows, and then quickly moved off across a field at an angle, as if to avoid him. He thought this détour rather odd. A few minutes later, as he advanced, he heard the fire crackling in the cane.

The man was one of the older laborers, who had been employed on the plantation for several years, and, though he told his story with a plethora of oaths and asseverations of his own truthfulness, both Grace and Rodriguez believed him. Moreover, his story confirmed Grace's suspicions that an incendiary was at work. The idea that some person or persons were actively plotting to ruin her father was now firmly fixed in her mind.

Alone in her room she went over the situation and the sinister figure of Don Malaquias kept obtruding in her thoughts. . . . Yes, she would write to Bobby now. She could not afford to let conventional scruples bar her from any possible source of aid.

Before she got her letter off the next morning, Fessenden made his expected call.

They sat on the shaded veranda. It was a subdued, sympathetic Fessenden who appeared this time, who apparently had no intention of referring to their last interview. But while Grace was agreeably surprised and attracted by his impersonal manner, she was wary, suspecting in his attitude the carefully studied rôle.

He was extremely solicitous about her father's condition and made her promise, unless Mr. Quintard should continue to improve, to let him send to Santa Cecilia for an excellent physician he knew of who had received his training in New York.

This subject disposed of, the talk naturally shifted to the work at Arroyo Hondo. And here Fessenden, while making an obvious appearance of optimism, had no cheering news. There had been unexpected accidents, annoying delays and the most rigorous supervision could not, apparently, keep the laborers to their jobs.

"I SUPPOSE we Anglo-Saxons in the south must make up our minds to face a growing irritation against us here in Latin America, particularly among the more ignorant classes," he explained. "The natives here always hated the big northern republic with a hatred founded on both envy and fear. They have envied Uncle Sam's prosperity and efficiency and his dominant position in the whole American scheme, and they have feared his strength and the length of his arm.

"The recent troubles between our country and Mexico have intensified this detestation, and in Veragua the feeling is particularly bitter. Fiery orators in Barrancas and Santa Cecilia are urging a proscription

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of the Gringos. The Miguelistas have made capital out of all this, and have strengthened their position by playing upon the popular dissatisfaction with the Government's amiable attitude toward Americans."

"You think the situation is serious?" asked Grace.

"Events of the past fortnight have opened my eyes. At first I looked upon the burning of our bridge as merely a random act of vandalism. Now I believe it was but the beginning of a conspiracy to drive us out of the country. The natives hate the railroad because it is a Gringo enterprise. I fear we have a nasty fight on our hands."

Grace thought silently for a time.

"You don't believe Don Malaquias had any hand in the destruction of the bridge?" she asked. "You know what reasons he has, at this time, to embarrass us."

Fessenden made an impatient gesture.

"For a man in his position the thing is absolutely unthinkable. Besides, why should he play with fire? He surely knows that once the natives are taught that they can with impunity attack the railroad, the road is likely to be crippled if not permanently put out of business. And then of what value would the plantation be to him —if he got it? Assuming that he wished to foreclose and take the place, why should he ruin it?"

"I suppose you are right," Grace acceded.

"Personally I prefer logic to alcoholic hallucinations," declared Fessenden with a short laugh.

"I don't understand."

"Our young friend Worden appears to be responsible for the theory of Bustillo's incendiarism, isn't he?" he asked.

"Yes, but——" began Grace and checked herself. "What about Mr. Worden?" she asked. "I only know he has been very kind."

"I don't believe he will impose his kindness upon you any more," said Fessenden. "Of course it's pretty hard to get white men to stick on the job here, Miss Quintard. The tropical climate seems to deteriorate them. Young Worden has merely followed a worn path. He quit the work a few days ago and was subsequently seen in Barrancas in a state of advanced intoxication. I think we shall see no more of that young man."

"Oh, I can't believe that of him!" exclaimed Grace involuntarily, and then she flushed at her words.

"At any rate, it's a subject of no importance," continued Fessenden in light tones, though he watched her keenly. "Now I want to hear all your troubles. How about these cane fires they've been talking about?"

Grace was profoundly shocked at this news of Bobby. She was astonished at the depth of her feeling, and now for the first time she realized how she had counted on his interest and aid. All her instincts clamored to her to disbelieve the story, but Fessenden's careless manner of imparting it carried conviction, and, besides, she knew how the hard-driven Northerner in the tropics habitually relaxed into dissipation.

In that country only men of temperate habits, of strong will, kept to their work. The others allowed themselves in their brief intervals of leisure the widest license of feverish amusement. They squandered money and health until finally the fever claimed them or they became unfit for employment, and drifted about from place to place, hopeless, sodden derelicts. Lessington (Grace had heard of him) was of this type in an advanced stage. But was Bobby one of these? At the idea Grace was shaken with a shiver of disgust.

Meanwhile she was telling Fessenden the story of the cane fires, the desertions, the disappearance of the new laborers and the theft of the payroll money, contriving to talk logically and concisely of these things while her mind groped for an excuse to rehabilitate Worden.

Fessenden listened gravely.

"This is a bad business—very bad," he said, as she concluded. "The railroad is strong, you are weak. The cowards know they can attack you with better success than me. It's an ominous situation here, and I wish you were out of it."

He got up and began pacing to and fro, frowning thoughtfully.

Grace was glad for a respite from his attention. She needed a chance to control herself, for she wanted to cry. Now that her only available supporter had failed her, there was indeed no place to turn for assistance. She was helpless and alone, fighting against unknown enemies who worked in the dark.

Fessenden, who kept glancing at her furtively, somewhat misinterpreted her attitude of dejection. He believed she was thinking wholly of her own helplessness.

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She was staring at the floor, and into her mind's eye came a strange picture.

It was of one of the men, a likable young engineer, who had come on the work some time before and, after a few months, vanished. There had been a further interval; and then, during a visit to Santa Cecilia, through the accident of a swinging door, she had caught a glimpse of him as she passed in a carriage, a glimpse that included a room clouded with smoke, a room of light and feverish music and moving figures and the man reeling in a drunken dance, a painted woman in his arms.

She was roused by the touch of Fessenden's hand, fingering her shoulder. He had stolen up behind her chair.

"Let me settle it all for you, little girl," he said softly. "Let me take up the fight, Grace."

SHE shrank, as much from his use of her name as from the touch of his fingers. In that instant she realized that at a word he would take all her troubles upon his shoulders, would probably save her father's plantation, would win the fight where she was almost sure to lose.

But in the same moment the suspicion flashed over her that through all his call he had been subtly leading up to this moment. In a revulsion of distrust and hatred she started up from the chair and faced him. Her sudden and instinctive escape from him stung the man. An angry flush surged into his face.

"Grace, you can't play with a flesh-and-blood man this way," he protested unsteadily.

"I'm not playing, Mr. Fessenden." She forced herself to look into his eyes.

"Were you playing at Arroyo Hondo?" he demanded.

Her eyes dropped.

"I deceived you," she said quietly. "I owe you an apology."

"I love you the more for being clever, Grace," he said. "Give me a woman with something of the devil in her. But do you know what the natives call me? 'The señor who gets what he wants.' "

She backed away as he advanced.

"I'm going to get you, Grace Quintard," he said.

"No," she replied slowly. "You will never get me now, Mr. Fessenden. Won't you please go?"

Suddenly, as if his passion was beyond control, he leaped forward and imprisoned her in his arms. In spite of her struggles, he rained kisses upon her face and hair.

"I've got you, torturer," he murmured brokenly. "Got you now." And then suddenly the great alarm bell on the sugar mill broke into wild clangor, and men could be heard running and shouting. Fessenden, the wild light dying in his eyes, loosened his hold and Grace slipped from his grasp as Frieda came hurrying to the doorway.

"Fire, señorita!" she stammered hysterically. "Another fire in the cane! *Madre de Dios*, in broad daylight the fire!"

Shrinking, her face aflame, Grace did not look at her, did not seem to hear. Suddenly she sank upon a chair and buried her head in her arms, while her body shook with convulsive sobs.

CHAPTER XI

BOBBY GOES ON A JOURNEY

BOBBY'S athletic training had made him quick in action. He was as strong and supple as a young panther. But now, so suddenly and skilfully had he been trapped, he found himself as helpless as a baby. An attempt to fight off his captors amounted to no more than a futile tightening of the muscles.

His captors first lashed his arms and legs securely and then adjusted the cloth over his head so that, while still covering his mouth, it permitted him to see. There were four of them. Three were yellow-skinned natives, dressed in dirty cotton trousers and undershirts, to all outward appearance in no way different from the hundreds of peaceful laborers on the work.

But the fourth was a broad-chested, sinister-looking scoundrel with a long hooked nose and his right cheek disfigured by a vicious scar that ran from chin to eyebrow. Unlike his companions, he wore shoes and battered leather leggings; and like them he carried a machete and a revolver. Planting himself in front of Bobby, he patted this weapon significantly.

"You come, all r-r-right," he said, making a gesture away from the camp. "You make no noise. Make noise—*boom!* I shoot."

Smothered in that tight gag, Bobby

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thought this warning superfluous. He nodded his comprehension, however. Under the leader's directions, the cloth was knotted more securely about his lower jaw and his legs were released. Then they led him into a narrow, overgrown trail, the existence of which Bobby would never have suspected had he passed it a hundred times.

As they left the main trail, he managed to shake his monogrammed cigarette case out of his pocket. People were passing there every day, and it might give some one a clue to start after him. But the man with the shoes picked it up and, with a formal little gesture, put it back in the pocket from which it had fallen.

For nearly an hour they walked and stumbled along the narrow path, which became more and more overgrown and difficult to follow. In one place two of the men drew their machetes and would have cut a way through the thick tangle, but the leader excitedly forbade it. Finally they came out in a little clearing, and Bobby saw five horses grazing.

His captors took one of these and securely tied its tail to the halter rope of another and its head to the tail of a third, and then indicated to Bobby that the animal that thus formed the middle of the sandwich was to be his mount. With his arms still bound, he was helped to the saddle, and the sinister-looking leader promptly rearranged the cloth so as to cover his eyes.

The cavalcade moved off, and Bobby soon recognized from the way he slid around in the saddle that the trail was going up and down a series of steep hills. On the infrequent stretches of level ground the horses would be spurred into the easy, rapid amble of the native ponies, but for the most part the pace was a walk.

All this time Bobby had taken the situation philosophically. What it all meant he did not know; but he did know that it was very essential that he keep a firm hold on his self-control. At first this had not been difficult. It was a wild, weird adventure, in which for the present he was getting the worst of it, but with the sublime faith of youth he never doubted that it would come right in the end.

Once he saw that no physical violence beyond that necessary for his capture was being employed, the thought of actual danger to his life did not occur to him, for he did not know how low a value the cold-hearted, shifty natives placed upon human life.

As the journey continued he began to experience severe physical discomfort. His cramped and aching arms tortured him cruelly, his jaws and neck were in acute pain from the stifling bandage, and the strain of keeping in the saddle without the aid of hands or eyes, with the horse constantly plunging and stumbling on the rough trail, was wearing away all of his strength. For endless hours they rode along in this way, and Bobby began to wonder doubtingly if he could keep his nerve to the end. Finally, just as he felt that he could endure the torture no longer, the horses were stopped and one of the men rode up beside him and slipped the bandage down from his eyes and then took it off altogether.

At first he thought he had gone blind, for he could see nothing and the world was a blank, spaceless void. But in this a match spurted into sudden flame, and in the quick flash he saw one of the men kindling a fire under the low, ragged thatch of a shelter supported by four poles. Then the leader untied his arms and signed that he dismount. With much difficulty, for his liberated arms were numb and useless, he slid to the ground.

Grinning at him horribly, the man spoke in his villainous English.

"You make noise thees time. All r-r-right."

"He's telling me to yell my fool head off," thought Bobby bitterly, and was just about to let out a few lusty shouts on the off chance that the fellow didn't know how much racket he could really make, when he was anticipated; for the man himself, drawing in a great breath, let out a deep-voiced halloo that boomed and reverberated through the darkness. Once, twice, three times he threw that tremendous volume of sound into the silent night. Then he turned back to his prisoner.

"You see?" he grunted. "No good."

The man, had he but chosen, might have gone twenty paces up the hillside and given voice to a high-pitched yodel that would have been heard in a peaceful village two miles below them in the valley; and shopkeepers would have swung shut and bolted heavy doors and looked to the window bars, children would have cried with terror, and sleepy *rurales* would have turned out under arms to the cry of "*¡Los*

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Miguelistas! ¡Vienen los Miguelistas!"

Of this Bobby had no suspicion, nor would the knowledge have served him. He made no attempt to emulate the man's astonishing vocal efforts.

"See, here!" he said. "What's this game anyway? Are you after money?"

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"You can't kidnap an American citizen like this," continued Bobby angrily. "You'll get into trouble—awful trouble. Get me? Uncle Sam will send down a warship—big guns—*boom, boom*—and a bunch of marines will come out here on the jump and blow you all to pieces. Understand? They'll clean out your whole blamed country."

The man shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands with a deprecatory gesture. He did not appear greatly impressed.

Bobby continued for some time to ask questions and expostulate, summoning all the Spanish phrases he could think of, but the man was either too stupid to understand or too callous to care. He would give no explanation, and when Bobby made it plain that if he had been taken for a ransom he wanted to know it, the man merely shook his head. So finally he gave it up. He might as well have talked to a tree as to the stolid, impassive bandit.

BOBBY suffered the man to lead him to the fire and there, in a few minutes, his captors shared with him a dinner of cheese, *tortillas* and hot, strong coffee. Though his freedom of movement was no longer restricted, he could see that at least one of the four constantly had his eyes on him. He speculated on his chance of making a dash for it, or grabbing for a revolver or a machete and precipitating a general mix-up, and decided that it was useless.

He had read tales of one gallant, active man throwing off half a dozen desperadoes by sheer dash and daring, but when it came actually to doing it it struck him that any fellow who started a row with four armed men and expected to get away with it would be a fool. So when they brought him the blanket that had been used under his saddle, damp with the horse's sweat and smelling like ten thousand stables, he disposed it about him comfortably and in five minutes had fallen into the slumber of exhaustion.

When he woke next morning he could tell little more of his whereabouts than the night before. The shelter they had slept under was in a steeply sloping open space surrounded on all sides by dense forest.

That they were somewhere in the mountains he could guess, not only by the declivity of the ground but by the freshness and chill of the morning air.

But evidently this was not their destination, for after a breakfast of coffee and *tortillas* they prepared to continue the journey. This time Bobby was allowed to mount without being bound or blindfolded, nor was his horse tied to the others. The reason was apparent soon after starting, for the trail grew so rough that had the horse been hampered it could not have made its way. Just as they started, the leader (Bobby had discovered that his name was Rogelio) warned him about escape.

"You run, I shoot. All men shoot," he said. Presently he continued: "I no hit, Juan no hit, Pedro, Santiago no hit, all same you no get back. Lost. You know where are we?" Bobby admitted he did not. "In *montañas, montañas de Sal Si Puedes.* No can get out. You leave us, one day, two day—*ya muerto!*"

And Rogelio made significant gestures at his mouth and his stomach to indicate the death that Bobby would die.

Thinking it over dispassionately, it seemed to Bobby that the old bandit had him.

He would have been willing to take the chance of a quick dash and trust to luck that they wouldn't hit him. Or he would have left them if he could have done it peaceably, and have run the risk of starving to death before he could find his way out. But to run the double risk was not even giving himself a sporting chance.

All that day they traveled over a rough mountain trail. Stopping where darkness overtook them, they slept under an improvised shelter of leaves and branches, and continued the journey at daybreak. Not once did Bobby see a sign of human habitation; nothing but the tangled, matted forest, uncannily silent, dark even at midday.

At last, late in the second afternoon, he heard a dog bark somewhere ahead; then he noticed a chicken scurrying into the undergrowth at the side of the road, and in a moment a little clearing appeared—a few acres of plantains, yucca, corn and coffee,

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all growing together in a haphazard sort of fashion, and a filthy-looking shack, in front of which a couple of naked brown children were rolling in the dirt.

A hundred yards farther on they came to another shack considerably larger. It was, in accordance with the primitive architecture of the country, a cylindrical structure of palm thatch, possibly fifty feet in diameter, surmounted by a conical roof drawn together clumsily at the top and crowned with an inverted iron pot. It boasted a single narrow doorway and was innocent of the luxury of windows. Before this house the party halted and dismounted.

A young girl who was washing clothes in the little stream that ran by the house jumped up, and calling out excitedly, rushed toward them and threw herself upon one of Rogelio's ragamuffins with violent and affectionate enthusiasm.

"Apparently we have arrived home," said Bobby to himself. He looked about critically. "I can't say that I'm keen about it."

Another young woman came out, then an old hag with a face like a withered potato, and last a fine, comely boy of some sixteen years. He was the only one to whom Rogelio gave the slightest notice. He rushed up to the lad and the pair embraced with true Latin demonstrativeness. From a certain remote resemblance between the two, as well as the display of affection, Bobby rightly surmised that they were father and son.

The three women, the boy, and half a dozen children of various sizes and hues all equally guiltless of raiment, seemed to make up the household. As soon as they had saluted their lords and masters they crowded about Bobby, agog with curiosity, pointing out details of his apparel and offering criticisms on his personal appearance without any attempt at concealment.

Bobby philosophically reflected that if he were to become for the time being a member of this charming family circle, it might be worth while to begin by establishing pleasant relations. Accordingly he patted the nearest fuzzy-haired youngster on the head, affected great surprise at something he felt, and then appeared to extract from the posterior portion of its cranium a big, shining silver dollar.

The audience exclaimed with wonder and delight, and Bobby was pocketing the coin with an air of mystery, when the child, giving forth a lusty howl, grabbed it from his hand. Bobby surrendered the dollar, amid the laughter of the others, but his social standing was assured.

Bobby was led through the narrow doorway into the interior of the house. As he stood upon the earthen floor, his first impression was merely of blackness and an intolerable complexity of odors. Then he could distinguish piles of rags and blankets —sleeping-bunks apparently—in various corners. Rogelio pointed out a disreputable hammock—the captive's bed. They left him there alone for a few minutes.

On the side of the room opposite his hammock stood a rough table and two benches. Near by the remains of a fire smoldered. And presently Bobby made out another captive there—a melancholy and bedraggled wild turkey, hobbled to a stake driven into the ground near the dying fire. It gobbled at Bobby interrogatively.

"Queer pet to have in the house," thought Bobby.

Presently the old woman hobbled in with a bucket of water. She set this down and knelt beside the smoking embers, pushing them together. Then suddenly she seized the turkey by its skinny neck and plunged its head into the hot ashes. Squawking horribly, the luckless fowl protested with a violent flapping of its wings, so violent that the embers were quickly fanned into a blaze. Thereupon, its duty performed, the bird was flung aside and the old woman went placidly on with her task of preparing supper.

In a few minutes a pot was boiling merrily and *tortillas* were cooking on hot stones.

After they had eaten a generous meal, Bobby thought the time was propitious to approach Rogelio again.

"How long you keep me?" he asked him.

The old villain scowled.

"*¿Quien sabe?*" he said. "Maybe one week, maybe one month, maybe two. *¿Quien sabe?*"

Bobby's heart sank, and without his knowing it a look of rebellious protest came into his face. The thought of staying out there inactive when he, and he only, had a clue to all the devilment going on back at Soledad and Arroyo Hondo was maddening. Hot rage seethed and boiled in his brain, and he was near making a break for it then and there. Rogelio saw it. He stepped back and patted first his revolver

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and then his machete and said grimly:

"You no go. I kill." Then he turned and pointed to the three other men and his son and said as he indicated each one—

"He kill."

There was an air of finality about him that was overwhelmingly convincing. Bobby saw there was no chance. But he managed to look at Rogelio with an engaging smile.

"Why—" he said, "why am I here?"

THE outlaw shrugged his shoulders. "*¿Quien sabe?*" he said, and walked away.

Three days passed—days in which every waking hour seemed endless. Though they left him alone and attempted no restraint of his movements, he was always conscious that there was not a moment when he was not watched by at least one of the men, and he knew any sudden move he might make would precipitate the whole tribe on him, even to the women and children.

The sense of physical inaction became almost intolerable. A dozen times a day he asked the fierce-looking old bandit how long he was going to stay, but the answer was invariably a shrug of indifference with the words "*¿Quien sabe?*" or "*El Dios sabe.*"

He tried, without much success, to find occupation for himself even to the point of keeping an exhaustingly minute diary. His notebook and pencil fortunately remained to him. He interested himself in the curious ways of that slipshod household of which he was an unwilling member.

Their laziness was incomparable. Their dirtiness was unique in its completeness. They were not dirty from mere carelessness or slovenliness, but rather from an absolute lack of comprehension that such a thing as cleanliness existed.

When Bobby, taking an escort with him, insisted on bathing once a day in the creek, they attributed this strange habit to some form of dementia. The old woman might not have bathed in half a century, according to Bobby's speculations. The larger wrinkles about her eyes and mouth showed little crusts of dirt that testified that washing the face was not an item of her daily toilet.

Most of these things he jotted down in his diary. It was intended for Gladys—if ever he managed to get a letter to her. He often thought of Gladys now. Even during the height of the rush at San Juan he had managed to write some sort of letter every other day. But he had received only four notes from her since he left New York. Sometimes he would start thinking of Gladys, and later would be astonished to find his thoughts had turned to Grace Quintard.

He told himself that Gladys must meet Grace. And yet he could not exactly see them together. What interests would they have in common? What could they talk about? Existence at La Soledad, which Grace so thoroughly enjoyed, would be intolerable to Gladys. And he could not imagine Grace leading Gladys's carefully shielded life in New York. The two girls were hopelessly different.

It was when he thought of Grace and the crisis at La Soledad that his captivity became most galling.

He earnestly tried to make friends with Rogelio's lieutenant, the stolid Juan, with the idea of offering a bribe. He still had the money he had brought with him. But on the third morning, when he decided to risk an offer, he discovered that his purse had vanished during the night.

The inaction, the filth, his helplessness—these things were slowly driving him to despair.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION IS WORTH EVER SO MUCH

OLD Rogelio was the undisputed despot of the household, ruling it with a rod of iron, and next to him ranked his son Andreas. It was apparent to Bobby that the boy was the apple of the old man's eye, and it was only when the two were together that he could ever detect a spark of human feeling in the old scoundrel.

On the morning of the fourth day Bobby, sleeping until long after daybreak, was awakened by a turmoil of excited, panic-stricken cries. Rolling hurriedly out of his hammock, he saw men, women and children clustered about young Andreas, who, standing very straight and still, was holding one forearm in the other hand, while on his face was a set expression of repressed anguish.

On the ground at his feet, its head severed by the stroke of a machete, was a slender little red snake, its lithe, graceful

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body still moving slightly. It took Bobby but an instant to recognize the most deadly of all the venomous inhabitants of the jungle, the beautiful coral snake.

The boy stood silent, the knowledge of impending death on his face, while the women shrieked and the men swore. Old Rogelio stamped up and down the floor, kicking dogs, pigs and children out of his way, speechless with impotent grief and rage.

Instantly Bobby thought of the little pocket lancet that he had been made to carry from the first day he had joined the surveying-party. He remembered how he had been painstakingly instructed what to do in case of a snake bite, and told that if it were done within five minutes the man would be sure to live.

Rushing up to Rogelio he cried quickly:

"Let me! I know how to cure it!"

Fortunately the Spanish word for cure is the same as the English, and so the old man understood him. Fortunately, too, Rogelio had been sufficiently in contact with civilization to know that the ways of white men are better than the charms and incantations of the native snake doctors.

"All r-r-right!" he shouted. "Come!"

Seizing Bobby by the arm, he dragged him roughly toward the boy, shoving the others aside with scant ceremony.

Bobby took the instrument from his pocket and, unscrewing the wooden cap and revealing the little blade of sharp steel, prepared to make an incision at the point where two tiny blue spots showed the entry place of the snake's fangs. Just as he was holding the lancet poised the old woman, seeing what he was about to do, screamed shrilly in protest, and flinging herself upon Bobby, tried to snatch the blade from his hand.

Rogelio, with an oath, threw her off, but in the scuffle Bobby gashed his own left hand with the keen point. Aware that every instant was precious, he was too absorbed to notice the stab. He made a deep cut in the boy's arm, and, unscrewing the cap of the receptacle at the other end of the instrument, poured permanganate of potash in the wound. He rubbed it in thoroughly and then put a tourniquet on the arm at the elbow.

Though the operation must have hurt him excruciatingly, the boy stood stolidly, unflinchingly, his big dark eyes upon his father's face. Rogelio's steady glance never wavered from Bobby.

When the task was completed, Rogelio grunted at Bobby, and with astonishing tenderness helped the boy into a hammock. Then for the first time Bobby gave heed to the trickle of blood on his own finger and felt the sting of his wound. He went to the brook and washed and bound up the cut. It was a slight one, but his finger felt as if it had been seared with a branding-iron.

Fortunately Bobby had been in time to save Andreas. Probably not more than two minutes had passed after the bite before he had used the lancet, and during that time the boy himself, by his frightened grip on his own arm, had helped to cut off the circulation of the blood. So he escaped with only a slight fever, which entirely subsided by night.

But by that time Bobby's own hand and arm had begun to swell and become painful. At first he paid no attention to it and only when it could no longer be ignored did he think of the cause. The blood from the boy's wound had got into the open cut in his own finger and with it had come some of the deadly venom of the snake.

Still it was impossible, he told himself, that enough of the poison could have got into his blood to do any serious damage. But as the night wore on the pain became more acute and his arm kept swelling. By morning he was delirious.

For twenty-four hours Bobby hovered between life and death, ignorant of all that went on about him. He was unconscious of the unremitting ministrations of those who watched and, awkwardly and without knowledge, fought to keep life in him; unconscious of weird barbaric incantations, relics of prehistoric days, with which they sought to appease mysterious, forgotten heathen gods; unconscious of Christian prayers to the Virgin and all the Saints that the life of this young *Americano* be spared; unconscious even of the vile concoctions of roots and herbs mixed with entrails of the snake itself, that they forced down his throat.

At last his healthy young constitution conquered and threw off the effect of the deadly venom. When he first regained consciousness he was weak as a child, but he knew that he would live.

Soon old Rogelio came to him and in slowly enunciated, elaborate Spanish made a speech of which Bobby was able to understand the gist.

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"SEÑOR," he said, with a new note of deference in his voice, "to you, who saved the life of my well beloved son, is due my eternal gratitude."

Bobby did not take well to heroics with himself as the principal hero, so he managed to murmur the Spanish equivalent for—

"It really is nothing; I only did what any one would have done."

"Nothing! Does the señor call it nothing to draw the poison of the snake from my son into his own body, and imperil his own life that the boy might be saved?"

It flashed across Bobby what the old man meant—that his superstitious mind had conceived the idea that he had in some mysterious way infected himself, and in so doing robbed the venom of its power over the boy. His first impulse was to laugh, but he restrained it, for he quickly saw what a tremendous advantage this delusion gave him; and after all, he *had* risked his life to save the boy, though the true chain of causation was not exactly what the old man thought.

Rogelio continued:

"Never shall it be said that Rogelio Monge does not know how to pay the debt of his son's life. Henceforth this house and all that is in it, or of it, is yours to dispose; and you have but to indicate your will. Should one of my people refuse to do your bidding, he dies by my own hand."

It took Bobby some time to get all that. He had picked up some Spanish by now, but even Rogelio's elaborate simplicity was too much for him. However, after several patient repetitions, he suddenly grasped the point.

"Wow!" he thought. "I might set up to be a bandit chief myself."

Then he realized that he was no longer a prisoner.

"I must go to San Juan at once," he said, excitedly trying to struggle to his feet.

Rogelio restrained him kindly.

"*Sí*, señor, the instant you are strong enough to travel; but you can see it is now impossible."

Indeed, the excitement of knowing he was free was itself too much for Bobby's strength. He fell back in his hammock exhausted.

For two days longer he stayed, getting back his vitality, or enough of it to enable him to sit a horse. During this period he obtained confirmation of all his suspicions. Rogelio now talked freely to him, and told him that while he was the principal chieftain in the field of the loosely organized collection of mountaineers and backwoodsmen who robbed and pillaged under the name of Miguelistas, the man back of him and from whom he took his orders was Don Malaquias; and it was the old banker himself who had commanded Bobby's capture.

This puzzled Bobby, for he did not see how Don Malaquias could have found out that he knew so much about him and his machinations. It was clear that if he did know, he would be anxious enough to get Bobby out of the way; but how did he know? There was a missing link somewhere.

He questioned Rogelio further.

"Perhaps," said the bandit, "it was not for his own purposes he wished you taken. Perhaps he was obliging some friend; or even taking orders. There is one whom even Don Malaquias himself is wont to obey."

"Who is it?" asked Bobby quickly.

"The *Administrador* of your railroad, señor—Mr. Fessenden."

Bobby held back an exclamation.

"You are sure?" he insisted.

"*Sí*, señor. What the relation between them is I do not know, except that they work together in some things. One thing I do know, though they do not suspect I know it. They once talked before me, not thinking that I could understand any English; and I discovered that although Don Malaquias wishes to obtain the plantation of Soledad, he is but acting for the other, to whom it will really belong once they have got it away from the old man."

Bobby could hardly believe it. Yet it must be so, for it made everything clear. And this it must have been that Lathrop suspected when he had said, "If you actually get the goods on any one, *no matter who*."

Well, he had them now, fast enough. That cablegram must be sent and sent quickly. He groaned as he realized that he was still too weak to ride. Then he remembered that Lathrop himself must be advised, and that too seemed impossible.

But here—perhaps Rogelio, who had put himself and all that belonged to him at Bobby's service, might be of some help. So Bobby asked if a letter could be sent to Lathrop, and to his immense gratification it

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proved to be perfectly feasible. It seemed there was an old and almost unknown trail that crossed through the heart of the mountains and came out in the valley near Jucaro, and Andreas Monge himself could go by it and carry to Lathrop anything the señor might wish to send.

So Bobby wrote out a short account of all that had happened, and that same afternoon Andreas started on what Rogelio said would be a three days' journey. The boy kissed Bobby's hand as he left.

Meantime Bobby burned with impatience to get back to Soledad, for weak and insignificant as he was compared to the powerful Fessenden, he felt that with his newfound knowledge he would be able to combat him, at least until Lathrop arrived. And in Lathrop he had implicit confidence.

CHAPTER XIII

BOBBY GIVES A REMARKABLE EXHIBITION OF BULL-HEADED OBSTINACY

ON THE evening of the second day after he had recovered consciousness, Bobby announced that he was well enough to ride; and Rogelio, looking him over dubiously, consented to let him start in the morning. Then, by the aid of a rude plan scratched on the hard dirt floor, he explained where they were.

Great was Bobby's surprise to find that they were not, as he supposed, two-days' ride in the interior of the mountains, but that it was no more than a matter of two or three hours out to the open valley. He discovered that when they had come they had followed a trail that led along the edge of the mountains and had never been more than a few miles from the valley through which the railroad itself was to run.

So that to get back he had only to strike out of the hill country on the shortest line, and then pick up the comparatively good road that led back to San Juan, a two-days' ride away.

Next morning Rogelio brought out for Bobby his own horse, a beautiful thoroughbred mare, evidently the fruit of some past raid. Himself mounting one of the native ponies, he guided the young man out to the edge of the woods; and then, giving him a few more instructions as to finding his way and telling him that he had some ninety miles to go, he embraced him, and much to Bobby's horror, which he fortunately managed to conceal, kissed him on both cheeks.

When Bobby turned his horse's head east toward San Juan he started off at a leisurely pace, for he had made up his mind that in his weakened condition it would be mere Quixotic folly to try to make the journey in less than two days, and Rogelio had told him of a place where he could pass the night without too much discomfort.

He had been riding nearly two hours when he saw a man coming along the road toward him mounted on a disconsolate little native pony. When they met the man pulled up and asked Bobby for a match. Remembering with detailed clearness the last time that request had been made of him on the road, Bobby handed it to him at arm's length. As he did so, he recognized the man as one he had seen in the stables at Soledad, and at the same instant the other penetrated the disguise of Bobby's unkempt beard.

"You no went Barrancas?" he said with astonishment.

"No," said Bobby. "Why?"

"Last week I go Arroyo Hondo. Take one, what you call, *carta* from señorita to you. They say you Barrancas. One *carta*, *sí*, señor."

"*Carta?*" said Bobby inquiringly. "What is that?"

"One *carta*, *sí*, señor," said the man stupidly, and started to go on.

"Wait!" said Bobby. "What is *carta?*"

"One *carta*, señor." The man looked puzzled and then made the motion of writing.

"A letter?" said Bobby, and the man nodded his head in agreement. "Have you got it yet?"

"*¿Quien sabe?*" said the man, as if it made not the slightest difference. But he began to hunt through the pockets of his dirty coat and presently produced a soiled, greasy envelope addressed to Mr. Robert Worden, in a neat, small hand.

"They say there that you gone," he explained, "so I keep."

Bobby tore open the letter and read it.

It read:

DEAR MR. WORDEN:

I hope you won't think I want to bother you with our troubles, but since you have been so interested and helpful, I thought I would tell you that things seem to be going from bad to worse. We have had a combination of mysterious cane fires, threatening letters, and unexplained desertions of labor,

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that all seem to be part of a plot to drive us off.

And to cap it all, father has been sick for several days. Mr. Fessenden seems to be greatly concerned, but unable to get to the bottom of what it all is. I feel I ought to tell you that in some way he has been led to think badly of you, for he has said some very unkind things, which naturally I don't believe. I can not write you about it very well, but when I see you I can tell you and then you must show him how mistaken he is. I hope it won't be long.—Very sincerely,

GRACE QUINTARD

"Where are you going?" Bobby asked the man when he had finished reading.

"To my house, señor. I leave Soledad. No good any more. All the time fires. Every night, one cane field, he burn. I go."

Bobby hardly stopped to bid the man good day, but put spurs to his horse and started down the road at a gallop. There could be no thought now, despite his weakness, of taking two days to get back. Every moment was precious. In a few minutes, though, he saw the folly of such a pace, when he had nearly eighty miles to go. He had never ridden that far in his life, but he knew it could not be done at a gallop. So he pulled up and put the mare into an easy trot.

He calculated that, barring accidents, he should be able to reach Soledad the following morning, but he knew that many things might happen to delay him. He had confidence in the mare, but it was a long trip for even the best and most willing of horses. He felt that under ordinary circumstances he himself was equal to such a test of endurance, but in his present condition the feat was more hazardous.

Then, too, there was always the chance of losing his way, and at night he would have to go more slowly. So he settled down to husband his own and his horse's strength to the utmost degree that was consistent with maintaining a reasonable pace.

ON EVERY stretch of level road he trotted, he walked the mare up and down every declivity, and led on the steeper ones, and always he watched the road with minute care to guide her where the footing was the easiest. At midday he stopped at a native shack and forced himself to wait a full hour, while she had a good feed of corn. He meanwhile refreshed himself with cheese and coffee and *tortillas*.

Again, just at dark, he stopped and, taking off the saddle, let the mare roll and then held the end of the halter while she grazed for half an hour.

When he mounted again he could tell from her springy gait that she was still in good condition. The night had come suddenly. There was no moon, but the sky sparkled with stars, and in their gentle glow he had no difficulty in following the way. Sometimes this was a broad road traversing barren uplands, and again it became merely a gully of mud walled in by a matted tangle of growth.

In some places the echoes caught up the hammer of his mare's hoofs until it seemed as if a regiment were pursuing. Again the very sound of her hoof beats became mysteriously muffled. Once, thinking he heard voices, he drew up suddenly and listened. In all that tremendous solitude there was no sound save the mare's panting breath. He patted her neck and rode on.

He himself felt thoroughly fresh and fit. But after an hour he was unexpectedly seized with cramps in the legs. Then came a pain in his right shoulder, as if some invisible agency were prying the bones apart. Next his arms began to ache. After a time his whole body seemed to be protesting against this unaccustomed strain. Finally it seemed that each step must be the last he could stay in the saddle.

He dismounted and led for half a mile, stumbling and blundering along in the darkness. Then he mounted again and started off at a brisk trot, but in five minutes keen-edged knives were lacerating all his muscles again. He bore the agony as long as he could, and then once more got off and walked.

When he remounted he urged the mare to a canter, in order to gain as much ground as possible before he had to give in again and dismount to keep from falling off. In this fashion he struggled on for hours. To distract his mind from his tortured, overstrained body, he talked aloud to himself, whistled and even tried to sing.

About midnight he came to a considerable river, which he knew must be the Rio Caigueran, a stream that, because it came from far up in the mountains, had a series of rises and falls of its own in no way dependent on the rainfall of the low country. Before he reached it, he could hear the ominous roaring of the water, and when he got to the bank and could see by the light of the rising moon the dark, swirling current racing by, he nearly wept with discouragement.

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The river was up and the ford impassable. He remembered hearing that the floods of this river sometimes went as suddenly as they came, so he stuck a twig into the lapping backwater at the edge of the bank and watched it. In fifteen minutes the water rose two inches.

"Still flooding. I may be here a week," he groaned aloud.

He stood for a few minutes, staring gloomily at the black river. Then: "I will get over!" he said, and stamped with his foot on the ground.

Only a madman would have attempted the crossing; but by this time Bobby was half crazed with pain and fatigue, and his sense of values had become so warped that his own life seemed to be a consideration relatively unimportant. Even getting to La Soledad was a task relegated to the background of his mind. What he wanted was to conquer that river. The contemplation of it, of its swift, sinuous strength, filled him with fury.

He took off his cartridge belt and revolver and tied them to the pommel of his saddle. He removed his leggings and spurs, intending to do the same thing with them, but in his half-dazed condition forgot about them the minute he had them off. Then, grasping the mare's tail firmly, he pushed her off into the deep water.

He first had to cross a few yards of backwater next the bank, and the mare swam rapidly—so rapidly that Bobby soon found that his own efforts were useless and permitted himself to be towed without making any attempt to help along his own progress. Then they struck the current, and the same instant he cursed his folly and wished himself back on the bank. The rush of the torrent caught him unawares and for a moment swept over his head, and as he came to the surface again he heard the mare snort, and saw that she was swimming for her life and his.

He saw a big foam-covered rock, that jutted out of the water, race up stream; then he noticed that the driftwood that should be wildly speeding down the river was barely moving, and he realized that he was being swept down at a terrific rate. Another big rock foamed by, then another; a small tree trunk slowly floated into them and lightly bumped the mare at the withers.

It turned her head down stream and then slid past. An endless time passed and yet he could see nothing of the other shore, and he gave up all hope of getting out, and wondered whether, when he was washed against the inevitable rock, he would be killed instantly or merely crippled and left to die by drowning. Water choked him, and his strength was failing fast.

Finally he realized that the mare was swimming more easily and that the current was not so swift; and then they were in the quiet water near the other bank. But it was here that he made a mistake that might well have proved fatal. The minute the animal felt the bottom he should have turned loose and made his own way ashore, but instead, partly from weakness, he clung to her tail while she pawed and floundered up the bank, and in her struggles she kicked him in the shoulder.

He took a single step and collapsed, lying with his head just out of the water. There he lay senseless in a swoon that was as much the result of exhaustion as the blow he had received.

Gradually the still rising water crept up until the back of his head was in a pool; then it lapped against his cheeks; it met over his chin, and only his mouth and the upper part of his face gleamed ghastly white above its dark surface.

The mare was grazing peacefully a few feet away. After a time she remembered she was thirsty. During that fierce fight with the current there had been no time for drinking. She came down to the water's edge with idle, luxurious deliberation, pawed about for a firm footing, and then put her muzzle down to the water. Then she drew back in sudden terror, and, with a prodigious splashing, retreated to the bank, for she had put her nose almost on Bobby's face.

The commotion she made aroused him. He sat up stupidly and saw nothing around him but water, and wondered into what strange world he had blundered. Then, with returning consciousness, he slowly realized his position. He looked about and saw the bank just behind him and the mare drinking noisily a few yards away. He painfully got up and went to her, and she suffered herself to be caught.

Getting into the saddle was a tremendous feat. So cramped were his muscles that in two or three attempts he was unable to lift his foot to the stirrup. The mare looked back in mild curiosity at his clumsy failures.

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But at last, with a supreme effort, he was up.

Through a tangle of slash and undergrowth he had to work his way back over the full mile they had drifted down stream from the road. Luckily the waning moon gave him some light for this task. For most of the way riding was impossible, and he was forced to lead his beast. It was a painful, zigzag, stumbling process, and time and again he was tempted to give up and throw himself down until morning. But somehow he persisted. Over an hour passed before he came upon the road.

He was still dazed and stupid, but he found that the soaking in the cold water had driven away, at least for an interval, the frightful cramps. Shivering in the keen night air, he started off at a brisk trot, saying to himself, in a sort of singsong in time with the rhythm of the hoof beats—

"I will get there—I will get there—I *will* get there!" . . .

IT WAS noon the next day that Grace, sitting on the broad veranda of the Soledad plantation house, saw a tired, wobegone horse turn in to the palm avenue and drag its way toward the house. The rider, although he was holding fast to the saddle with both hands, swayed about drunkenly and threatened at any minute to fall to the ground. As he came closer she could see that he was hatless and that his clothes were torn, that the two-weeks' stubble on his face was caked and matted with mud, and that his eyes were bloodshot and staring.

With a sickening pang, she recognized Bobby.

She had been hoping against hope for his arrival. Obstinately clinging to a feminine intuition, she had not believed Fessenden's stories of his dissipation. But here was proof. She stared at him in horror, as he came lurching up the broad avenue. Then suddenly she sprang to her feet.

"Amador! Amador! Come here quick!" she cried toward the office.

"Good morning," said Bobby thickly, as the mare, trembling in every limb, came to a stop in front of the veranda. The young man was still clinging tightly to the saddle. He did not trust himself to dismount without help.

She turned from him with a shudder of disgust as Amador appeared.

"Take him away," she ordered in a shaking voice, and went into the house.

Bobby gaped stupidly at the door as it closed behind her. Then his body crumpled limply and he fell unconscious to the ground.

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH BOBBY LOOKS EARNESTLY AT A PHOTOGRAPH IN HIS WATCH

WHEN Bobby had pitched limply out of his saddle, the fierce-looking Amador knelt down and examined him with slow deliberation. In a long and varied life he had seen much violence, and accidents that cost men life or limb were no new thing to him, so he now saw no reason to lose his head or exclaim with wonder. Also he had seen exhausted men collapse.

He felt over Bobby's limp body and convinced himself that no bones were broken. Then he regarded his drawn, haggard face. The boy was sound asleep.

Calling a laborer to help, the *mayordomo* carried Bobby to his own house, and clearing a litter of rubbish off a cot that stood in a little room looking out on the tiny patio, he put him on it. Then he took off his boots, threw a quilt over him and returned to the horse.

Within the house Grace surrendered herself to the bitterness of grief and despair. She had trusted Bobby. She had looked upon him as her knight, upon whom she could depend to interpose with all his energy and resource between her and the machinations of her enemies and save her from the net that was every day drawing about her more tightly. But he was nothing more than an irresponsible, dissipated boy who had abandoned her at the time of greatest need and now had the miserable taste to show himself in such a state.

She got up from the sofa and dragged herself wearily to her room. There she sat upon her bed, staring sightlessly into space and thinking dully upon the catastrophe in her life. Her thoughts all took the trend of despair. Of what use to struggle longer? What could she, a girl, alone and unaided, weak with all the feebleness of her sex, do against this far-reaching, unscrupulous plot to rob her and her father of the land that they had so fondly hoped was to be their fortune?

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Were he ten years younger, she knew her father would give way to no man, would surrender to neither stratagem nor violence; but now——What was the use? Why fight longer in a losing struggle? It was better to give up, save what little they could from the wreck and leave this accursed country. She could go to work, and with what she could earn and what they might salvage from the wreck, the two of them could still live. She heard her father moving about in the library and got up and went to him.

Mr. Quintard was pacing to and fro along the rows of his beloved books, his lean hands held behind his back, clasping and unclasping nervously. He had grown very old in the past few weeks.

"Well, daughter?" he said, coming to her with a wan smile and placing a hand upon her shoulder.

"Father," she said quietly, "let's give it up. It's useless to hold out any longer. These people are too strong for us."

The old gentleman resumed his nervous pacing.

"Don't you think that with Fessenden standing back of us we still have a chance to win?" he said.

"But does he stand back of us?" she replied despondently. "I have lost faith in Mr. Fessenden. I am beginning to lose faith in every one, I think."

"Why, daughter!" said Mr. Quintard, pausing in his walk. "I thought Mr. Fessenden admired and liked you so much that quite aside from other considerations he would be sure to help us. Are you sure you are not mistaken?"

"No," said the girl in a low voice, "I know I'm right."

"But isn't he a friend of ours?" he protested.

The girl bit her lip and her face flushed.

"No," she answered with averted eyes. "Not of mine."

"What do you mean?" said the old man quickly.

She was silent for a moment.

"It is not easy for me to tell you," she said at length, "but—but what Mr. Fessenden feels for me is not friendship. It's something that to me is horrible. And—and he wants his price for the help which he is able to give. Father—" her voice caught a little—"don't you think that we can give this up and start over again? I can help."

But at her words a look of blank despair and hopeless discouragement came into the old man's face; and seeing it a wave of pity swept over her. Perhaps Fessenden had been right, and she did owe more to her father and less to her own qualms and scruples.

"Father!" she faltered. "Father, never mind. I'll pay. It won't be so bad."

The old man looked at her searchingly.

"Do you care for him at all?" he asked.

She shook her head silently.

HE WALKED to the other end of the room and stood gazing out of the window with unseeing eyes. When he came back to her he walked with a lighter tread, his shoulders were squared back and every line of his fine old face showed resolution, but his gaze was still fixed on something far away.

"Grace, my child," he said quietly, more as if speaking to himself, "I have never talked much religion to you. You probably don't know how old-fashioned some of my beliefs are. One of them—the strongest—is that when I die I shall once more see your mother. Do you think I could go to her if I had sold her daughter?"

He put his hand on her shoulder and drew her into his arms.

From the open door came an apologetic cough. Mr. Quintard looked up and saw Amador waiting to speak to him.

"Yes," he said. "What is it?"

"Pardon, señor," said the *mayordomo* respectfully, "but I have come to see if perhaps the señorita could lend some sheets and a pillow, that I may arrange a bed for the young señor with more decency and comfort."

"What señor, Amador? Who is it?"

"The young American who a few minutes ago arrived."

"Who is it? Do you know anything about it, Grace?" he asked turning to his daughter.

"Yes, father," she replied, with a pang that she must tell of Bobby's disgrace even to her father. "It's Mr. Worden. He rode up here just now and had to go to bed. He was—sick."

"What's the matter with him? Why didn't you call me?"

"I am afraid," she said reluctantly, "he has been drinking. And——"

Amador interrupted her.

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"If the señorita will pardon me, I think she is mistaken. The young man shows no sign of drink. The horse on which he arrived had come so far that it dropped with exhaustion, and yet it bore not a sign of fast riding.

"To kill such a horse as that one must travel many leagues, so many that the rider will more often be the first to succumb. No, señorita, the señor has come from a great distance and is worn out—nothing more. Moreover, he has the look of one who has recently passed through a severe illness; and——"

But Grace waited for no more. She ran out of the room and the house and, with a palpitating heart that swept away all thought of maidenly reserve, but rather spurred on her flying feet, she sped over the lawn to Amador's house.

Even as she ran she wondered wildly whether he were ill or perhaps dying, and the thought came to her that even while she had been thinking of him as worthless and undependable, he had been lying there uncared for and untended except for the rough ministrations of Amador. Then she remembered with a sickening wrench at her heart strings that fall from his horse, which she had seen through the window.

As she crossed the threshold, breathless and panting, she stopped. What was she going to say to him? She paused for a moment while she forced herself to be calm. Then, going in the house, she inquired of a slipshod servant who was waving a broom idly across the floor, where the *Americano* was.

"In there, señorita," was the listless response, as he pointed with his broom.

"Tell me—is he ill?"

"Who knows?"

With fevered calmness, a chaos of emotions beneath her thin crust of self-control, Grace crossed into the patio and went in the open door that the servant had indicated.

It was a little room that Amador had used as a lumber yard for all that useless junk that accumulates in any household—piled high with stacks of old papers and magazines, broken furniture, old saddles and bridles, heaps of old clothes; and over all dirt and cobwebs. On a dirty, tattered canvas cot, for which somehow a space had been cleared, lay Bobby Worden, sleeping.

He was sleeping when he was carefully lifted on a stretcher and carried over to the plantation house; sleeping when he was gently put in a wide, soft bed with clean, white sheets and downy pillows; still sleeping when for the twentieth time Grace came and stood at the head of his bed, and, looking down at him, prayed that it might be nothing more than fatigue that had held him unconscious from the noon of one day to the morning of the next.

Then he awoke and saw her standing there. She was smoothing his pillow, and her head was bending over his, when she saw his eyes open. She drew back in embarrassment, flushing crimson, as if there were something in her own eyes which she did not wish him to read. But Bobby was waking up on the river bank, and remembering he must catch the mare and go on. How did Grace come to be there? It was she whom he was riding to see.

"Good morning," she said pleasantly, smiling down at him now in frank, friendly fashion. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Bobby. "But how did this happen?" His glance roved over the big comfortable bed and around the clean cheerful room. "It's great, anyhow," he added with a sigh of luxurious contentment.

"Don't you remember?" she asked doubtfully. If only he did not remember that brutal rebuff she had given him!

"No, I don't seem to remember much after I got through San Juan. I had to keep awake that far to send a cable for Lathrop." Then, with quick concern, he added—

"How about the mare?"

"She'll do," she said. "She can't be ridden for a long time, though. But tell me—how are *you?*"

"I'm all right, I suppose," he said, and stretched himself tentatively. "Ouch!" he said involuntarily, as his overstrained limbs telegraphed their indignant protest to his brain. "No, no," he said hastily, as he saw the concern in her face, "it's only stiffness. There's absolutely nothing the matter with me."

"You're sure?" she demanded.

"Sure."

"Then the one important thing for you to do now is to eat some breakfast, and you must wait until I get it."

As she left the room his eyes followed her more wistfully than he himself knew.

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Bobby declared that as soon as he had finished breakfast he was going to get up; but after the meal he felt differently. The effects of the strain he had undergone showed not merely in aching bones and muscles, but in a profound mental lethargy that settled down on him and made him content to lie in bed with a vacant, idle mind, the gravity of the situation that had carried him along on that heartbreaking ride completely forgotten.

He lay there all day, alternately dozing and waking. He did not summon the mental energy to tell Grace where he had been, nor even to give her an intimation of the surprising experience he had gone through and its relation to her affairs. She, dismayed at his strange listlessness and fearful of the effect of exciting his mind, refrained from all mention of the plantation affairs, or any question as to what had been the reason for his own strange absence, but instead steadfastly devoted herself to ministering to his purely physical needs.

The question of definitely abandoning La Soledad, urgent as immediate action had seemed when she had talked to her father, she now put entirely out of her mind. Over him she watched with a tenderness that was almost maternal. She told herself it was wholly so.

IT WAS late in the afternoon, and the long shadow from the sugar mill had stretched across the yard as far as the scarlet-flecked hibiscus hedge in front of the house. Grace was sitting at the other side of the room, apparently busy with needlework, but really covertly watching the invalid, when a maid brought in a note addressed to her in a scrawling, unformed hand. Crossing the room to see if the interruption had disturbed Bobby, she stood by the bed as she perused it. In illegible, badly spelled, ungrammatical Spanish, she read:

SEÑORITA:

This is from those who wish to you no ill will; but the interests of country are always first in the breast of every true patriot, and for the sake of those interests we are regretfully compelled to sacrifice you. The spectacle of the fair lands of La Soledad in the hands of foreigners is one that can not be tolerated.

Therefore this is notice that in twelve hours from the time of its receipt we expect you and your father, and your administrative force of renegades, to leave the plantation. Should you seek to resist this decree, the consequences be on your own head. We have the power to enforce our will, and rather would we see every field swept by fire and every building a mass of smoking ruins than to leave La Soledad in the hands of foreigners. As to human life—we wish no harm, but when our country is to be benefited the cost can not be counted.

LOS MIGUELISTAS

As Grace read this extraordinary epistle her face grew pale, and, watching her through half closed lids, there came to Bobby a realization that something was wrong.

"What is it?" he said as she finished.

"It's an unspeakable threatening letter," she said, forgetting that he must not be excited.

"Let me see."

She translated it for him; and as she did so Bobby's benumbed brain suddenly sprang into activity. And at the same time came a flood of self-reproof for his own slothfulness. When she stopped reading he was once more awake, keen, eager to throw himself into the fray.

"But I shouldn't be bothering you with all this," she said with a qualm of conscience. "And besides, I don't really believe there is anything in it."

"But there is something in it. No," he put in as she tried to protest against his agitating himself. "I'm all right. I've been in a daze all day, but I'm all right now. Now listen, Miss Quintard."

Briefly he narrated the events of his kidnapping and release, and told her what he had learned of the connection between Fessenden, Don Malaquias and the Miguelistas.

Strangely enough, it was not the startling discovery of the nature of the plot to rob her father of La Soledad that riveted her attention so much as did the few simple sentences in which he told of his own adventures and escapes.

"And you came all the way from Vega Sucia without stopping?" she questioned.

"Yes," he assented impatiently.

"But how did you get across the Caigueran? The men say it is in flood?" She was staring at him, wide-eyed.

"Swam it," said Bobby. "Or rather the mare swam it, and I trailed along at the end of her tail."

Grace, fearless horsewoman, splendid, vigorous young creature of steady nerve and cool head, grew pale at the thought. To Gladys it would have sounded like a fine adventure, with just that thrill of risk that

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would make it something to repeat to her friends.

But Grace knew. She knew enough to understand that when Bobby had started across that wicked, raging torrent there had been but one chance in a hundred of his coming out alive. The knowledge drove from her head all thought of her own present danger. Even now, that by the hundredth chance he had won through, it set her atremble with terror. It was all over. He had not been killed, but suppose one of the other ninety-nine chances had turned up?

"Why did you do such a thing?" she said, her voice betraying something of what she felt.

Bobby knew what he had done had been dangerous, and perhaps he might have told about it to a crowd of the fellows at home with some pardonable pride, secure in the knowledge that the least touch of braggadocio would have brought their scoffing jeers; but to have Grace—Miss Quintard—make a hero of him for it was decidedly embarrassing.

All the more so because it produced in him a certain pleasurable sensation that he vaguely felt was not altogether fitting for a man who was engaged to a perfectly nice girl at home. He had an idea he was on the verge of getting much too—too—he didn't exactly know what. Too intense, perhaps.

He saw a slender hand on the edge of the bed, and was seized with an insane curiosity to clasp it to see if it was as firm and smooth and soft as it looked. But he did not. Instead he mentally shook himself, much as a dog does on coming out of the water, and said with studied lightness:

"Oh, I suppose I did it because I didn't know any better. I was in a hurry. I wanted to get here quickly, so I just jumped in."

She looked at him indignantly.

"What nonsense!" she said. "Of course you knew the danger." She stopped for breath and a softer look came into her eyes. "And as for your running that risk, for any reason in the world—it was not right."

"Of course it was," said Bobby stoutly, shaking himself again at finding that the first time had been quite without effect. "I had to get here. Can't you see I had to tell you all about what I had learned?"

"Can't you see," she said very quietly, "if anything had happened to you what it would have meant to—to us, to all of your friends? Oh, I might never have been able to——"

AN EXPRESSION had come into Bobby's eyes that caused her to break off abruptly. It was as if he had started forward with outstretched arms. Startled, flushing slightly, she arose to her feet, all her maiden senses in full retreat. For a moment she stood silent, and Bobby could count his heart beats. Then she turned and slowly left the room, and his eyes, following her, remained fixed on the door which she closed behind her.

He lay still a little while and then shook himself—actually, this time. Feeling under the pillow for his watch, he opened the back and gazed long and earnestly at a beautiful, artistic representation of the fair-haired, dainty-featured girl whom he was to marry some day. As he snapped the cover shut with a sigh, his eyes caught the threatening letter that had been dropped on the floor and forgotten.

He jumped up with a sudden accession of energy. Here was a very present need of prompt action, and instead they had been wasting time discussing whether or not he should have crossed a certain river. It had been crossed, and that's all there was to it. That he had crossed another river which he had long been approaching, he did not know.

He dressed hastily and went to find Mr. Quintard. The old gentleman was in the library with his daughter, and when Bobby came in she had just finished telling about the letter. Mr. Quintard was at first inclined to make light of it, but when Bobby explained that it was now certain that Fessenden and Don Malaquias were back of the whole conspiracy, and related enough of his experiences to substantiate his statements, Mr. Quintard took the matter more seriously.

But even then it was hard to make him believe that Fessenden himself was connected with the plot.

"Admitting that Mr. Fessenden would be willing to concern himself in such scoundrelly proceedings," he said, "I still fail to see where his interest lies. It seems to me highly improbable that he would risk his present position by involving himself in anything of the kind."

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"He probably thought La Soledad worth the risk," said Grace simply.

"Yes," said the old man thoughtfully, "it is worth the risk."

Presently, after some meditation, he added:

"If this attack, or threatened attack, is being engineered by Don Malaquias for the purpose of getting control of the plantation, they are not going to do any more actual damage than they can help. He is not the man to bite off his nose to spite his face."

"I suppose they will simply confine themselves to running you off the place," said Bobby.

"Try to, you mean," said Grace in a matter-of-fact way.

Bobby looked at her sharply, and was astounded at her coolness and self-possession. She did not seem nearly so much perturbed as when she had been discussing the closed issue of his swimming the Caigueran.

"Look here, Mr. Quintard," he broke out, "I don't want to intrude, but somehow or other I feel as though I had been mixed up in this business so much that I belong in it. Now, what's the matter with our first getting Miss Quintard to a place of safety and then organizing a little army of our own and telling these fellows to come on? It ought not to take long to get *rurales* from Santa Cecilia, and we can hold the bandits off that long."

Mr. Quintard thought for a while. An old man, often lacking in decision in unimportant details, he was not, however, one to refuse to face a crisis, or weakly to permit himself to be intimidated. He looked at Bobby's eager face and was inspired with a feeling of confidence quite out of proportion to the young man's years and experience.

"You're right, Mr. Worden," he said at length. "I don't think these scoundrels will do very much once they are convinced that their threat does not frighten us. Grace can go down to the camp at Arroyo Hondo with Amador and half a dozen of the most reliable men as escort, and we'll hold the fort until help comes either from there or Santa Cecilia."

Grace was sitting comfortably back in a big arm chair, with a certain suggestion of reposeful permanence in her attitude. She smiled slightly and said with studied calm:

"When you two get done arranging matters, you might explain in just what way you expect to get me to leave."

"What do you mean, Grace?" said her father.

"Only that I am not going," she replied.

"But you must!" both men protested at the same time.

Followed five minutes of wordy expostulation and insistent arguments, through which the girl remained unmoved and emerged victor. She was not going. She would not attempt to argue with them, but she was not going and that was all there was to it. The sooner they recognized and accepted the situation the sooner they could begin to make definite preparations.

Mr. Quintard, who had not lived twenty-one years with his daughter without gaining some knowledge of her character, was the first to acquiesce and submit to the inevitable.

The first thing to do was to plan their campaign, and the most important thing in that was to insure the arrival of aid at the first possible moment. Accordingly within the half hour a letter was despatched by a carefully selected messenger to the Governor at Santa Cecilia, asking for a force of *rurales* as soon as they could be rushed out.

Bobby, for his part, sent letters back to Wilson and Ed Curtis telling them to come on up and bring any of their roughnecks that wanted a good scrap. He let them know that Miss Quintard was on the plantation and would not leave it for a place of safety, so that it was up to them to bring the safety to her. He knew that this would fetch them as fast as their horses could travel, even if all the bridges in the world had to stay unbuilt.

Still, by the most favorable of calculations, it would be a full day before they could be expected, and the *rurales* from Santa Cecilia could not arrive for at least two days. The warning letter gave but half a day's grace, and inquiry developed the fact that it had been committed in the morning to a shiftless stable boy of short memory, who had not delivered it for several hours; so that if the threat were fulfilled to the letter there remained but a short time to prepare.

Somewhat reassured by their own action and the prospect of succor, the trio resumed their council of war. They did not suspect that the messengers were intercepted at the edge of the plantation and the letters

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got no farther than Don Malaquias, who was lurking expectantly in the neighborhood.

The instant Mr. Quintard left the plantation, the wily Bustillo was planning to take possession in the character of mortgagee. Once established there, the influence, both open and insidious, that he enjoyed with the Government and the Courts would make it impossible to oust him.

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH BOBBY CLOSES HIS WATCH

A QUARTER of a mile back of the house, crowning a gently sloping hill, stood an old stone blockhouse, a relic of the days when the Spanish proprietors stood in constant readiness to defend their holdings. It was a round, squat tower, its two-foot walls pierced with loopholes on the first floor, while the roof was crowned with a crenelated parapet, which afforded a second tier of defense.

The massive wooden door of the place had long ago fallen off its hinges, but it would be a simple matter to repair it or construct a barricade in its place.

Here, they decided, they would seek refuge, would make their stand. For this very purpose it had been built, and for this purpose it could still be used. The hundred years or more it had been standing had not altered the topography of the land. The blockhouse still commanded the plantation settlement, and to reach it from any direction it was still necessary to cross a wide stretch of open pasture land.

That the emergency was purely a question of securing their own safety and resisting an attempt to run them off was a deciding factor in the selection of the blockhouse. If it had been a case of a purely malicious bandit raid, the objective point of the raiders would have been the mill, where a few minutes of destructive work would result in the wrecking of thousands of dollars' worth of machinery.

But as long as the men back of the affair wished to secure the plantation for themselves, it was safe to assume that as little damage as possible would be inflicted on the place. Hence, the problem of defense was simplified. For their purpose the blockhouse was ideal.

Immediately they acted on the decision. All of the house servants and whatever laborers they could pick up were put to work carrying to the blockhouse provisions, water and bedding, and also all the plantation books and accounts and such of the stock of the plantation store as might make the strongest appeal to looters—particularly all the liquors.

Then came the question of the garrison. Amador naturally they included, and his two sons Salvador and Rafael, two slender but sinewy young men who promised some day to be as fierce-looking as their father; and Rodriguez, the herculean mill foreman. All of these could be trusted implicitly, but after that they came to a stop. The loyalty of Bonito, the bookkeeper, was unquestioned, but at the first mention of a fight he nearly had a convulsion from sheer terror, so it was decided not to include him. Nor could they think of another one among all the foremen and straw bosses of whom they felt absolutely certain.

Still, after all, they did not anticipate a serious attack; and six men who could be depended on would be able to make sufficient show of resistance to discourage the bandits from storming the blockhouse. Frieda, of course, was to be taken along, although she could not be counted as adding to their powers of defense or offense. For arms they had a dozen good Winchester rifles with plenty of ammunition, which were always kept on hand for emergency.

When everything was ready the practical-minded Grace gathered up a bundle of magazines and books and a pack of cards.

"I'm quite sure," she said, "that we are going to be bored to death much more than we are to be excited by war's alarums. Therefore, if we wish to be on speaking terms when we come out, we must have something to occupy our minds."

Bobby looked at her admiringly.

"Bored, did you say? I hope they keep us there a week." And he sniffed scornfully.

They moved into the blockhouse unmolested, at six o'clock in the evening. The first thing they did was to eat a hearty picnic dinner, and then, the excitement of preparation over, with nothing to do but await developments, they all began to feel rather foolish and melodramatic.

Bobby's mental state was something he could not explain even to himself. He hoped most ardently and sincerely that

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there would be no trouble; but at the same time he was afraid there would be none, and all this preparation, most of which had been at his instance, would go for nothing. It might merely be another case of the King of France and his ten thousand men marching up the hill and then down again.

As he remembered it, the King of France was always supposed to have cut a very ridiculous figure on that occasion, so the chances were that in the present situation he was going to appear in an equally ludicrous pose before Grace—no, Miss Quintard—no, hang it—he had known her a long time now—Grace.

The mere idea of appearing foolish before her made a warm, uncomfortable glow spread over him. Why should it? It was most unaccountable. He clutched at his pocket to feel the watch that had that saving picture in it, just as Grace's clear-toned voice broke in on his meditations.

"Who is going to leave this stuffy place down here and come up on the roof and watch the shooting stars with me?"

"I am," said Bobby with alacrity, letting go the watch.

Taking a couple of camp stools, they climbed the rickety staircase, went through the trap door and out into a sea of darkness. So black was the night that the ground below was lost in the gloom; the fireflies that flickered in the fields might have been other worlds at infinite distances, and the myriad stars that shone overhead so many little lights that they could reach out and touch.

All sense of space and distance was swept away except the realization of the present nearness to each other. Silently Bobby set the stools against the parapet, and silently they sat down. For minutes neither spoke. Sitting up there on the top of the world, poised between heaven and earth, suspended between reality and unreality, ordinary small talk of daily intercourse would have been sacrilege.

FINALLY Grace spoke. Her voice was very small and faint in the velvet stillness of the night, but yet to Bobby it was a music that blended with divine harmony into the magical enchantment that lay on his senses.

"There has not been time for me to tell you before," she said, "but I want you to know how very much I appreciate all you are doing for us. You have indeed been a friend, and have put us under obligations that will be lifelong."

"You mustn't talk that way," he replied. "I have done little enough, and only wish it were more."

She disregarded his denial and went on: "It seems so strange that only a month ago we had never heard of each other, and now here you are working and struggling and running terrible risks to help us with our poor little affairs. Do you remember that afternoon we met in the road beyond San Juan?"

"Do you think I could forget that? Do you remember that Sunday afternoon I came over to Soledad?"

The little blind god laughed.

Do you remember? He had heard that as many times as there have been lovers since the world began, and always it had had but one meaning. Of what importance are fire and flood, wars and calamities? The one thing that matters, my dear, is: Do you remember that time you dropped your handkerchief and I picked it up and gave it to you?

Presently she said:

"For us it was a fortunate meeting. Suppose it had not happened? Without you we should have lost La Soledad surely. It must have been fate."

"Yes," said Bobby solemnly, "it must have been."

Fate! Again the blind god laughed. When had he heard that before? From the ends of the earth we have come, my dear. By just one possible sequence of ten thousand fortuitous circumstances we have met and learned to know each other, and the world is wonderfully beautiful. Yet, had one of those ten thousand been otherwise, what a sorry place it would be! What else can it be but Fate?

They were still for a little while. Bobby, without knowing how it happened, found his hand resting on hers. Then across the heavens swept a fiery trail of light.

"Oh, look!" she exclaimed. "What a splendid one! Have you forgotten? That is what we came up here to see."

A remark trivial enough; but in her voice was a strange catch, a pathetic little quaver that suddenly tore the scales from Bobby's eyes.

Where was he going? What was happening? That he himself was drifting, sailing

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placidly along into very pleasant waters he had been dimly conscious. But she, too!

It never had occurred to him that a girl could fall in love with a fellow except after long and ardent wooing. Gladys had not. The thought horrified him. He, an engaged man, had been letting Grace come to care for him. To his impulsive, straightforward nature there was but one thing to do; and he did it brutally and without tact.

He got up and walked to the other side of the parapet, leaving her astounded, a little hurt. Then he came back and blurted out:

"Miss Quintard, I have been wanting to tell you for some time that I am engaged to a girl at home. I came down here to get enough money to marry on."

The tempered steel of the girl's courage bent until point touched haft, and then sprang back, straight and true.

"Why, how lovely! And how nice of you to tell me!" The words fairly tumbled out of her mouth in the rush of her enthusiasm. "You know, I consider it a very great compliment that you should tell me. And you must tell me everything about her. I know, though, how nice she must be."

Bobby, awkward with shame and embarrassment, made no reply; and Grace rose to her feet.

"It's high time to go down and let father know we have not blown away, or got lost, or anything," she said as she walked toward the staircase. As she reached it she commanded herself again.

"You really will tell me about it, won't you? You won't mind talking to an old friend? That is what friends are for, you know. I can tell you how lucky she is, and you can tell me how much you love her."

And she started down the steps.

Without any warning Bobby was suddenly engulfed in a deluge that swept away self-restraint, principle, everything except his overwhelming love for Grace. In a voice that halted and stumbled with the intensity of his feeling he said:

"Love her? Not one hundredth part as much as I do you."

Between the taking her foot off one step and putting it down on the next, she fought a battle—and won. He never saw her hesitate. Her head swam, her knees were nearly giving way; but lightly, almost laughingly, she gave back her answer.

"What nonsense! Why, you don't know me at all!"

With this she ran quickly down the stairs.

Bobby stood flushed and terribly ashamed. What an insufferable, conceited fool he had been! He felt like knocking his head against the stone parapet.

It was as clear as noonday that beyond ordinary friendliness she cared not a snap of her fingers for him. And after his rash outbreak he feared that not even her friendly interest would remain. She would think him a cad. Oh, the shame of it!

And yet, amid all his tumultuous self-recriminations, he was glad that he had told her. It was a relief to have acknowledged his love for her. In spite of his confusion and dismay he would not have recalled his words. He loved her beyond measure, and was shamelessly proud of his love.

He was certain now that he no longer loved Gladys. He saw with absolute clarity that he never had loved her, that he had been ignorant of the very nature of love.

But of course he was bound to Gladys. Even if Grace had cared for him, as she did not, he was still bound to Gladys.

As he walked back and forth across the roof, a thousand twistings and turnings of this theme running through his mind, he strove hopelessly to come to some brighter solution of the situation, but his thoughts always drove into the same blind alley. Life seemed very empty and miserable and little worth the living, and the hushed stillness of the world was no more silent than the voice of hope in his breast.

After a time Amador interrupted his gloomy revery. Would the señor take some sleep while his servant watched for a few hours?

Bobby responded that he did not feel like sleeping yet. In fact he knew that sleep was not for him that night. So Amador, after an attempt at persuasion, withdrew and left him on the roof alone.

CHAPTER XVI

THE DISADVANTAGE OF PRESSING A TRIGGER BY MISTAKE

A SHAVING of moon was floating low in the sky and it was well on toward morning when Bobby, nodding drowsily from his long vigil, was roused by the *rat-tat-tat* of distant hoof beats. In that great stillness they sounded like an army of cavalry.

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Voices, too, came to his ear. The bandits had arrived.

He quickly went down to arouse the others, and presently they were all on the roof to watch and listen.

The night air distorted the sounds and made it impossible to tell whence they came. The pounding of the horses' hoofs was now faint, now louder, now dying away. Then with sudden distinctness came a thumping, pounding noise, like the boom of a bass drum. At the first reverberation Bobby's overwrought nerves made him start. Grace put a warning hand on his arm.

Again came the sound and in the same instant they saw a little light flare up and go out.

"They're at the house," whispered Grace.

They could hear quite distinctly a noise as of the unbolting of the house door, then a chorus of voices, then one voice. A servant apparently was telling the bandits of their absence. Silence followed.

Bobby could feel his pulse beats and knew that his breath was coming quickly through dry throat and mouth. What were they doing now? If only there were light! He felt the touch of Grace's hand again.

"They will wait until morning now," she said. "They'll never come up the hill in the dark."

She seemed as unconcerned as if the affair were an afternoon tea.

There followed an intolerable period of suspense, while the watchers peered into the darkness. Occasionally there was a murmur of voices; occasionally they could catch the flicker of a match from the yard in front of the house as one of the invaders lighted a cigarette. Beyond this there was nothing to relieve the nervous strain. Apparently Grace's prediction was correct and the bandits were waiting until morning before making any farther move.

But in the blockhouse every hour they waited for the dawn had a thousand minutes, every minute a thousand seconds. Every sense was strained to the utmost. They spoke infrequently and in whispers. Only in a corner of the parapet old Frieda huddled, mumbling audibly over her beads.

At last, after an eternity, the stars in the east began to grow pale and on the horizon the deep black faded into gray. By the first dim twilight they made out, in the yard about the house, immense, misshapen horses picketed to trees and posts, and the shapes of Titan—tall, angular, and distorted—sprawled on the grass or on the porch or moving slowly among the horses; the bivouac of a Gargantuan cavalry seen in a nightmare.

Then the clear daylight came, diminishing these terrifying figures. It revealed a score of scrubby native ponies and an equal number of barefooted, yellow-skinned men—less awe-inspiring perhaps than the twilight apparitions, but to one familiar with the unscrupulous native craft and cold-blooded native cruelty, a band not to be considered lightly.

As soon as it was full daylight they saw a man coming across the field to the blockhouse, and presently recognized Pedro, the corral boy. He came to the door and called to be let in, saying in a voice that was high-pitched and shaking with fright that he had a message from the bandits. Mr. Quintard answered from the roof and told him to deliver it.

It was that the outlaws wished no harm to Mr. Quintard and his family, insisting only that they should leave; and if they complied immediately they would be allowed to go in safety.

"Tell them no!" shouted the old gentleman. "Say that we stay here."

"But, señor!" protested the frightened man.

"But, nothing!" called down Grace. "Tell them what the señor says. Go!"

Pedro returned in an ecstasy of terror lest he should personally be held responsible for his master's refusal to listen to reason. But he was back again within ten minutes with the word that if they did not evacuate the bandits intended to burn all the houses and the mill itself.

"Nonsense!" said Grace scornfully. "Tell them to go ahead if they all want to be hung when the troops come up."

That the incendiary threat was indeed a bluff they all felt convinced. They knew that though the bandits would not refrain from destruction through fear, it was no part of the plan of those back of them to inflict unnecessary damage on the plantation. So the reluctant Pedro was sent back with another message of defiance.

"Moreover," said Mr. Quintard, as they watched the boy going down the hill, "there is little danger of their making a real attack.

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Don Malaquias is canny enough to realize that if we are staying here we must be expecting aid, and he won't precipitate a conflict if there is any way to prevent it.

"I don't think he has any humane scruples, but he knows well enough that if it comes to actual fighting in the open, this gang of outlaws will stand no chance with Government troops. He knows it better than they do, and will do everything possible to restrain them and get us out without a pitched battle. Our best plan is to stay where we are, peaceably, and refuse to move. If we do anything to irritate them too much, they might get out of hand, and then even Malaquias would not be able to hold them in."

It was evident their refusal to be intimidated put the bandits in a quandary. Apparently, by way of keeping the rank and file amused while the leaders settled their plans, permission was given to loot. The watchers saw the plantation store broken into and in a few minutes every man of the bandit crew was parading about with an armful of plunder.

A few headed for the stable where the riding stock of the Quintards and the plantation foremen was kept, and in a few minutes they came out leading such of the horses as met with their approval. Bobby, standing close to Grace, heard her exclaim with anger as one man appeared leading the beautiful white horse Madrigal, that was her own favorite mount. The beast, as if realizing the ignominy of his new mastership, hung back at the end of the halter and when outside of the corral gate planted his feet together and flatly refused to budge.

Whereupon the man commenced to beat him with the flat of his machete.

"Oh!" cried Grace. "The unspeakable brute! If Madrigal would only swing and kick him!"

"If I could only drop a shot into him!" said Bobby, as he sighted longingly along the barrel of his Winchester.

"Be careful! We mustn't give them any excuse to begin, you know," she said.

"Oh, I know," he replied. "I won't. But all the same it would be a tremendous satisfaction just to put a bullet into the calf of that brute's leg."

All this time the man was belaboring the terrified animal, and presently one of the blows left a long, dark streak on the horse's flank. His machete had turned and he had struck with the edge.

GRACE, seeing it, gave a horrified cry, an exclamation so sudden that it produced in Bobby a spontaneous involuntary reflex. His finger tightened on the trigger and the rifle went off. The man spun half around and dropped, while the released horse galloped off.

For a minute Bobby, dazed, hardly comprehended what he had done. Then he straightened up and turned to Grace, who had instantly grown serious.

"Well," he said, "now I've done it. That's what you call helping you, I suppose!" he finished bitterly.

Grace looked at him strangely, an expression he could not fathom in her eyes.

"Never mind," she said quietly. "It was an accident. And it can't be helped now."

Just then Mr. Quintard appeared from below.

"A shot?" he queried soberly.

"I fired by accident," said Bobby, "and hit a man."

The old gentleman looked very grave. In his self-accusing remorse, Bobby wished that Mr. Quintard had sworn at him.

"Do you suppose," he asked, "if I went down there and tried to explain—offered myself as hostage, so to speak—it would prevent reprisals?"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Quintard impatiently. "They'd shoot you, and it wouldn't help us. No, my boy, we are all together." He hesitated and looked at his daughter. "Except, perhaps——"

"No exceptions, father!" she put in briskly. "Besides——"

A shrill buzz in the air over them, and at the same instant half a dozen sharp reports from the direction of the house! The Miguelistas were beginning promptly.

"Get below, Grace!" ordered Mr. Quintard quickly, but she did not move.

"And you," he said, turning to Bobby, "you hit a man by mistake. What you want to do now is to hit as many as you can on purpose. The kid-glove stage of this affair is over."

By this time Amador and his two sons and Rodriguez had rushed up, and the six men disposed themselves at the loopholes. Grace, who also wished to handle a rifle on the firing-line, was peremptorily forbidden to do so by her father, so she sat on the floor between the positions occupied by the old gentleman and Bobby.

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At first they could not see where the shots came from, but presently, along the line of a ditch that bordered the driveway leading up to the house, there appeared a few light puffs of smoke; and in a second came more reports and more whistlings over their heads and a sound like a sharp hammer blow on the stone wall of the blockhouse just below Bobby's loophole.

He and Mr. Quintard both fired and saw two little spurts of dust at the edge of the ditch. The four natives fired and two bullets plowed up the grass half way down the field; the others were not seen. Your mixture of Latin, Indian and negro blood is not a good marksman at the best of times, much less when the target is shooting back.

"You see," whispered Mr. Quintard, "that's the same sort of shooting that those fellows down there do."

The reports were coming in an uninterrupted series now. Bobby reflected that by pure accident a bullet might happen to come in a loophole just as a fellow had his head exposed taking aim. Still he rested his rifle on the stones and put his head in the opening to take another shot, and by sheer force of will he did not hurry his aim—nor did he expose a fraction of an inch more of his head and shoulders than was necessary.

He remembered hearing stories of how, in some Continental armies, recruits are taught to take cover by the instructor firing a blank round at any man who shows himself, and occasionally substituting ball for blank. He realized what tremendously effective instruction that must be.

He shot again and a third time, each time throwing up a puff of dirt at the line of the ditch. Then, as he slipped back from the loophole, he heard Mr. Quintard call excitedly—

"Now then; get them quick!"

He looked out again and saw the late occupants of the ditch streaking it back for other shelter. Evidently it had been too hot for them there. The members of the little garrison fired as fast as they could, but a running man a quarter of a mile away is not easy to hit, so the fleeing bandits reached unharmed a hedge of hibiscus that stood along the edge of a deeper ditch, and there they vanished from view.

Ensued a few minutes of calm, and then the shots began again. This time they were puzzled to make out where the firing came from. While they were peering about, Grace, unnoticed, crossed over and, taking an unoccupied loophole, unslung a pair of field glasses and looked through them.

"The back windows of the house," she announced calmly, just as her father, discovering what she was doing, ran at her to drag her back and scold her for her recklessness.

She had accurately located the enemy. Looking intently, they could see the little puffs from the windows, almost indistinguishable against the white adobe background.

"Put a few shots in the windows," said Mr. Quintard. "We won't hit anybody, but it will stop their taking aim. They'll just hold their rifles out and shoot at random."

The effect of their volley into the windows was as he predicted. The firing from the other side increased in volume, but became wild.

Old Amador rose to his feet and started to walk back to get more ammunition, when Bobby heard a sound like that of a butcher striking a side of beef with his cleaver. The old fellow staggered and then, picking up the cartridges, rushed back to the loophole and fired a string of shots, accompanying each one with a lurid oath. A stream of blood was gushing from his shoulder.

"Amador!" called Grace. "Stop swearing and come here and let me fix it up."

The old man looked at her stupidly, the wild light dying in his eyes.

"Pardon, señorita," he said finally. "It is I who lose the temper. A thousand pardons."

He walked over to her; she dexterously peeled off jacket and shirt, revealing his naked torso, which in an instant was painted with red. Without a shudder she washed the blood away, manipulated his arm to see if it were broken, and then finding that the bullet had passed through his left shoulder and plowed on through the muscles of his left breast without apparently striking a bone, she packed the wound with absorbent lint held in place with many windings of bandage. All was done with quietness and certainty and the calmness of a trained surgeon.

When she had finished, Amador thanked her, and then with the stately high-flown courtesy that is the heritage of all Spanish blood, be it of the manor or the plow, said that the wound was a cheap price to pay

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for the privilege of receiving her ministrations and that it had been a bad example for the other men of the garrison, for they would be sure to do likewise.

He looked meanwhile at Bobby, with a grimace intended to be a facetious smile. Bobby, who could follow little of the dialogue, wondered what made Grace blush so furiously.

THE shooting from the house continued with increased intensity and was replied to by the defenders with less rapidity but greater accuracy. Bobby found that instead of being inspired with caution by the sight of Amador's wound he was imbued with such a desire to retaliate that in his efforts to get a good shot at the attackers he exposed himself recklessly.

He was shooting so rapidly now that his rifle barrel burned his hands when he touched it, but it was only at those empty windows that he was able to aim, for not a man was visible. Finally he saw something moving in a clump of bushes behind the house, a flicker of white, and as he was trying to make out if it were a man, the volume of fire from the windows redoubled and two men broke out and ran across twenty yards of open ground to another thicket, nearer the blockhouse. He fired twice and missed both times. Mr. Quintard saw the rush also, and called to him to be on the watch for more of them.

Presently the fire increased again, and two more men rushed out. One of these they hit before he reached the middle of the open space. He slumped down, rolled over and then began to crawl back to the house. Another pair charged across while they were watching him. From the second shelter they soon saw a man come out and run for a fold in the ground at the very edge of the field in which the blockhouse stood.

From this hummock it was but a short dozen yards to the bottom of a little swale that ran through the field, passing close to the blockhouse. Almost at the same time Mr. Quintard, Amador and Bobby saw the design of the bandits' attack. Under cover of the fire from the house, they were gaining the shelter of this shallow, undulating depression, and once in it they could advance to within fifty yards of the blockhouse without being exposed to its fire. Then they would make a rush and batter down the door. Bobby figured it all out in his mind, and then he glanced at Grace and shuddered.

"Stop every man you can," said Mr. Quintard briefly.

But as he spoke, four more broke across and only one of them was hit.

"I'm going out where I can get a shot down that hollow," announced Bobby, after a brief interval.

"You're going to do nothing of the kind," said Grace.

For answer he filled his pockets with cartridges.

"Don't think of it, Worden," urged Mr. Quintard.

"But can't you see," insisted Bobby, "it's the only way to keep them off? They can get close enough to rush us, and then we are gone."

It was indeed true, and they both recognized it. Mr. Quintard said nothing.

"Please don't," begged Grace.

"Look here," said Bobby. "This whole business is my fault. It's up to me."

He went down the steps and, with the assistance of Amador and his sons, swung back the heavy door. As it opened, the firing from the house ceased. He stepped out and they shut it behind him.

In the same instant a bullet screeched in his ear deafeningly and his hat was whirled from his head. Something struck at his feet, throwing a cloud of dirt over him. It seemed hours before his legs responded to the call of his brain and he began to run toward the gully.

CHAPTER XVII

WHAT IS POSSIBLE WHEN ONE IS BORN LUCKY

BOBBY, when he was in school and college, had dabbled in athletics, played baseball, gone out for the track team, and once represented his university as second string man in the sprints; but never, even when in the pink of condition and assisted by such accessories as near-nakedness, spiked shoes and a well packed cinder track, had he made such speed as he did over that fifty yards of rough turf between the blockhouse and the gully.

As he ran bullets sang by him and tore up the ground at his feet, and the friendly rifles in the blockhouse maintained a continuous crackle in their efforts to keep down the opposing fire. He was not afraid, for he had

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no time for fear. All his powers of mind and body were concentrated in a supreme effort to reach shelter before a bullet caught him.

Almost headlong, he flung himself into the little grass-covered hollow, and once there the whistling of the bullets ceased as if by magic. Breathless, he stood, taking note of his surroundings. The blockhouse was shut from sight by the ridge. His only view was up and down the narrow ravine.

Far down the swale, where it ran out of the field and passed back of the house, he saw a group of ragged men sitting at their ease, smoking. There was a sudden popping of rifles from somewhere off in the outside world and then two newcomers plunged into the ravine and joined the group. Almost at the same instant they saw Bobby and let loose a scattering volley.

He threw himself flat on the ground as the bullets screeched over his head, and quickly crawled a few feet to the shelter of a little hummock. Still panting, no less from excitement than bodily exertion, he threw his rifle to his shoulder and emptied the magazine as fast as he could work the lever. He wanted to shoot, to make a noise, to feel the gun actually going off in his hands.

When the snapping of the hammer on an empty chamber told him that he had fired the last shot, he noticed in a half dazed, stupid way that the ground a few yards in front of him was plowed and furrowed by a dozen bullets, and some purely mechanical functioning of his excited brain told him this was the result of his own shooting. With shaking hands he reloaded, and the same automatic action of his brain made him say aloud to himself—

"Now if I were a regiment of a thousand men, I might do that and have a chance of hitting some one; but as there's just one of us, I've *got* to shoot straight."

He took aim at one of the men—they were all flat on the ground now, huddled into what shelter they could find—and, waiting until the violently oscillating foresight came to an instant's rest, he fired, to hit yards to one side.

"Now just for that," he said grimly, "you wait twenty seconds before the next shot."

He counted them off, the last ten with accumulating rapidity, while the wavy circles described by the muzzle grew smaller and slower. He fired, and this time there was no spurt of earth. His man rolled over and lay out in the open, quite still.

The next time he sighted, his barrel lay steady in his hand.

But now that he was shooting accurately there was no longer a target to fire at. It takes a very small inequality in the ground to conceal a man who lies flat, and when a good marksman is shooting, the stupidest of men has an unerring eye for such inequalities.

Bobby waited, and before long he saw one of them wriggling from one shelter to another. He shot, but too late. Then he saw another; and both of them nearer than at first. They were working up on him, slipping with diabolical cleverness from one hiding-place to the next.

Of course, he told himself, when they got close enough he would be bound to see them. But then they would rush him all at once, and it all depended on his shooting straight and fast when that moment came. So he contented himself with firing only when he had a fair chance of hitting, and every time he fired he put a fresh cartridge in the magazine, so as to have it full when the crucial moment came. Also on the ground, near the breech of his rifle, where his hand would drop on them without any unnecessary reaching, he placed a little heap of cartridges.

Their stealthy advance was uncanny. An arm, a leg, the whole of a man's body would appear for an instant beside some innocent-looking hummock or boulder. Before he could get a shot, the apparition would vanish, leaving him staring at the place, wondering if his eyes were playing tricks on him.

While he watched that hiding-place, another man would be glimpsed for an instant nearer. His assailants made no sound. Occasionally Bobby shot at a moving form, or what he supposed might be a creeping man. Again he would let fly at a waving tuft of grass. But his bullets found no mark.

Then for a period came absolute silence. Nothing stirred in the little ravine. A sudden shadow startled him terribly. It was a bird flying between him and the sun. Its plaintive cry was a monstrous intrusion in that stillness. It passed, and silence reigned again. He felt the sweat stream off his face. It dripped upon the back of his hand. Alert, peering, grasping his rifle firmly, he waited.

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AT LAST a ripping, crashing volley swept over him, tearing the grass about his hummock, and with that a dozen men sprang out of the ground a stone's throw away, and amidst a chorus of wild Spanish oaths, ran at him, each with a long, naked machete in his hand. His head was throbbing so that he saw them as through a haze. He aimed at the leader. He fired, and the man still came on. Again he shot, and the man still rushed forward. Wiping his eyes hastily with the back of his hand, he pulled the trigger a third time, and the man flung his machete away and plunged forward on his shoulder, for all the world as if he were falling on the ball in a football game.

The others, yelling like demons, were close upon Bobby now.

Bobby turned his rifle on the second man, viciously snapping down the lever to throw a fresh cartridge into the chamber. The breech mechanism jammed. He tugged at the lever with all his strength, while the long, wicked machetes came closer every instant. The lever broke in his hand.

Then without conscious volition, he found himself running out to meet them, his rifle held by the scorching hot barrel. He was going to break a few heads open before they got him. He heard, as if it were the voice of a stranger, his own voice shouting and cursing.

The man nearest him carried his carbine. Dropping his machete, he aimed the gun deliberately at Bobby's head. Bobby looked into the barrel and leaped forward. If he he could only get a smash at the fellow before——

Suddenly the man, with a grunt of dismay, lowered his weapon. Shouting a few words of command, he flung out his arms to stop those behind him. Then he held out an empty hand with the palm turned toward Bobby. Checking his wild rush, Bobby stared stupidly into the man's face. It was Rogelio.

The old man walked up to Bobby, who stood still, holding his clubbed rifle ready to swing.

"What is this, friend?" said Rogelio. "It is not right that you and I should seek each other's life."

Bobby, the haze of fighting still on him, returned the hand clasp mechanically. He felt that this must be but an interlude and that in another minute they would be beating each other's brains out. But slowly the wild passion died and left him trembling like a leaf. His breath came in great sobs and he was afraid he was going to make a show of himself with tears.

"Sit thee down and rest," said Rogelio kindly. "When one shakes hands with death it leaves the body exhausted. Sit thee down, my friend, and let us talk of this strange thing."

The men in Rogelio's band were muttering unpleasantly by this time at their leader's unexpected display of clemency, but the old man silenced them with a few curt words. Gradually Bobby steadied himself and the pair talked as best they could with each knowing so little of the other's language.

It seemed that a few hours after Bobby had left Rogelio's house the old bandit had received instructions from Don Malaquias to collect as many men as he could and move on the plantation. On the way he had been met by the old banker himself and received orders which were in substantial agreement with what Bobby and the Quintards, from their knowledge of the situation, had guessed.

"But had I known that thou wast here," said the old man, "never would I have attacked without first securing thy safety."

"But the others?" said Bobby. "They are very dear friends of mine. When you attack them it is the same as if you attacked me."

Rogelio took this in thoughtfully. Finally he said a man had been killed. The blood of the guerillas was up. It was a difficult situation, and he did not believe that his obligation to Bobby could be extended to all his friends. All this he explained with great politeness and tact.

"They are not kin of thine, are they?" he asked.

"No," Bobby admitted.

"If they were, it would be different," declared Rogelio, "since for what thou hast done for my blood I am beholden to all of thine."

Bobby, appalled, saw Grace's chance of safety slipping away. He started a stammering protest, but the words died on his lips.

And then, quite suddenly, came an inspiration.

"They are not kin," he said slowly, for with even the strongest of incentives he could not lie easily, "but—but the señorita is to be my wife."

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Rogelio looked at him for a second and then rose to his feet.

"Pedro!" he called to one of his men, "return to the house and tell them to stop shooting. Quickly!" Then he turned back to Bobby.

"It is enough," he said simply. "Would that I had known before."

They agreed that Bobby should return to the blockhouse to notify the others that the fighting was over, and he insisted on Rogelio's going with him. So Bobby first climbed out of the gully and waved his handkerchief to assure them it was all right, and then the two of them walked across the open field.

The door was open when they got there, and everybody waiting to receive them and learn what was responsible for this sudden change in the aspect of affairs.

Bobby had meant to get in a few preliminary words of explanation, but Rogelio was too quick for him. Disregarding all the others, he went straight to Grace and before she realized what he was doing he had taken her hand and, bowing low over it, kissed it with all the stately deference of a courtier.

Then he commenced speaking to her in voluble, rapid Spanish. What he said Bobby could not catch, but in an instant the blush that spread over the girl's face told him the import of the words. Bobby prayed that she would understand why he had lied and that she would not deny it. He looked at her, but she would not meet his eyes.

Then he heard her murmur a few words of thanks. She was backing him up. Old Mr. Quintard, who understood what Rogelio was saying, looked at Bobby with an expression of amazement and, afraid of uncovering the deception in the bandit's presence, Bobby was forced to nod affirmatively.

As soon as the first explanations were over, Rogelio assured them that he would withdraw his men immediately. There had, it appeared, been but one man killed, the one whom Bobby had shot in the final charge. Half a dozen were wounded, but only two were unable to travel; and these Mr. Quintard and Grace said should be cared for on the plantation, and not all the troops of the Government would be allowed to touch them.

While these arrangements were in progress, such of the bandits as were not attending to the wounded had come up through the field and clustered about the blockhouse, inspecting with curiosity the stronghold that a short time before they had been preparing to storm.

ON A LITTLE hill, some three quarters of a mile from the Soledad plantation house, a man had been sitting since dawn. He was an elderly man with finely graved, vulture-like features and wicked-looking eyes, the whites of which were flecked with brown specks.

He seemed to be intensely interested in what went on about the Soledad house and in the field behind, where stood the blockhouse, for he kept a pair of powerful binoculars constantly leveled in that direction. In fact, the only times he did not gaze through them were when he stopped to roll and light a fresh cigarette.

His interest became tense when Bobby broke across the open from the blockhouse. He swore when he saw the boy reach safety. When, a few moments later, he saw Bobby wave the white flag and then go back to the blockhouse accompanied by Rogelio, he chuckled with satisfaction.

He was still more pleased when the gathering of the bandits around the little stone tower showed that the resistance of the defenders was definitely at an end. He shut up his glasses and, putting them back in the case, strolled toward the house, smiling amiably.

It would be hard to say who was the most astonished when Don Malaquias walked into the midst of the little group about the blockhouse.

Bobby instantly conceived an inordinate desire to go for him in good Anglo-Saxon style and enjoy the infinite pleasure of planting his fists on the old villain's hypocritical countenance. Grace started and caught her breath, and Mr. Quintard's right fist clasped and unclasped nervously. Old Rogelio alone wore a mask of impassive composure.

"Well, well!" said Don Malaquias with every appearance of friendliness. "It would seem I have arrived just in time. What is it all?"

"What you see," said Grace, the first to find her tongue.

"That it is serious I can readily see," said the old villain. "Perhaps I may be of some help. These men may possibly listen

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to one of their countrymen. Let me speak to their leader here a moment."

In a flash they realized the false idea that the old banker had; that he thought they had yielded to the bandits, and now, with sleek hypocrisy, he was pretending to intercede for them. So they kept still while he drew Rogelio to one side and conversed with him. They could see that Don Malaquias was doing most of the talking, while the bandit replied in monosyllables. Presently they came back, the old banker looking grave, the bandit still impassive.

"Have no fear, señor," whispered Rogelio to Bobby. "My word to you I keep. What I say to the old fox is talk, nothing more."

At the same time Don Malaquias spread out his hands deprecatingly.

"It is bad," he said in unctuous tones. "It is, I fear, hopeless. The man is implacable, insisting that you leave the plantation instantly, else he can no longer control his men and serious disaster may result. I would that I might help you in some way, but it seems I can not."

"Perhaps you can," said Bobby. "Let's go in the blockhouse for a minute and consult."

"Willingly," said the other. "To the best of my poor ability, I am at your service."

They walked in the door, Bobby standing aside to let the older man enter first. As they got inside, Malaquias turned toward Bobby. As soon as his man was facing him squarely, Bobby, with all the strength of arm and shoulder, drove his fist into his jaw. The old banker stared stupidly out of his fishy eyes, tottered a second, and then crumpled into a limp heap on the floor.

"Bring some cord in here, please," called Bobby. "No, Miss Quintard. Don't *you* come in."

In another five minutes Don Malaquias came back to consciousness to find his arms and legs securely tied and Bobby, Mr. Quintard and Rogelio looking down on him. The wily mortgagee looked about as happy as a fish that has jumped from a stream into a frying-pan. Also he was greatly amazed at his sudden change in environment.

"Now Don Fish-Eye, your game is up," said Bobby. "For the present we'll salt you away where you'll do no harm, while we consider just what's coming to you."

Don Malaquias cast at Rogelio a glance of penetrating inquiry, but the bandit leader turned on his heel and walked away. Then the trussed don looked in turn at Mr. Quintard and Bobby, and his eyes suggested shooting in the back and stabbing in the dark.

Mr. Quintard returned his stare coldly. Then, turning to Bobby he said:

"Worden, I am opposed to violence. I deplore violence. And I have always tried to practise the Golden Rule and love my enemies. But I find myself envying you the purely esthetic satisfaction of punching this fellow's head."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE POSSIBILITIES OF GOOD LUCK STILL FURTHER DEVELOPED

LEAVING their loot behind them, Rogelio and his band had just departed by a little-used trail that led them direct to the safety of the mountains, when for the second time in two days a man rode up the drive of La Soledad on a horse that collapsed as soon as the rider dismounted.

He was a slender little man, rather insignificant-looking. He glanced at the house, noting that some of the windows were smashed, and then at a couple of mattresses and several parlor chairs upon the lawn near the smoldering remains of a camp-fire built on the edge of a flower bed.

Then he leaned over and loosed the girth of his horse and removed the saddle bags. Straightening up, he took off his eyeglasses, calmly wiped the dust from them and replaced them just as Bobby rushed down the drive to meet him.

"Hello, son," said Lathrop cheerfully. "What's up? This place looks as though something had just blown over it."

"We've had a scrap, sir," said Bobby.

"Son," said Lathrop, "I've a good mind to give you a time check for not waiting for me with that scrap. Don't you know the boss is supposed to get in on all such doings? Tell me about it."

Bobby told his story while they were routing out one of Amador's sons to see to Lathrop's horse.

"Good boy," said Lathrop, when he concluded. "You've had most amazing luck. Of course Wilson didn't get your note asking for help. Probably the don lighted a cigarette with it. You have to send two or three messengers in this country.

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"But one of the plantation hands blew in there, crazy with fright, just as I arrived, and though he was too scared to talk, we gathered something was wrong and a rescue party started with me. Having the best horse and being about forty pounds the lightest, I breezed in first. Thank the Lord you came through all right."

Somehow all necessity for planning or managing things vanished from Bobby's mind once Lathrop was present.

"What are you going to do now?" he asked.

"Build that railroad in a hurry," replied Lathrop with a grin. "But first we've got to drive a few spikes into your friend, Mr. Bustillo. Come into the office here, where we can talk it over."

Lathrop led the way into the place and sat for a moment with his hands clasped behind his head, smiling quizzically at the ceiling.

"I'd love to give him a bath," he said, "but I'm afraid the dirt goes clear through." Suddenly he seized a sheet of paper and began to write. When he had finished he tossed it to Bobby. It was a clear statement of Fessenden's part in the conspiracy.

"We'll make the old Greaser sign that and then turn him loose," said Lathrop. "Also we'll give him to understand that if he ever proceeds on that mortgage we'll tell the Government all we know about him. He'll realize what that would mean. He'd be arrested and then, somewhere on a quiet stretch of road, his guards would shoo him away a few feet and empty their carbines into him.

" 'Shot while attempting to escape,' would be the report. On the whole, I think that old *sin verguenza* will not bother us again."

They went to the blockhouse, where Don Malaquias still lay, guarded by old Amador. Lathrop explained in a few emphatic phrases just what would happen to him unless he did their bidding, and before Lathrop concluded the banker was ready enough to sign the statement. Lathrop untied him and stood over him while he scrawled his name.

"Now, then," he said, "beat it."

Don Malaquias walked hastily to the nearest cover without looking back.

It was now nearly noon. They walked back toward the house where Grace, with the aid of such few servants as she could muster, was attempting to restore some semblance of order.

"Hello," cried Lathrop, glancing down the road that led to San Juan and thence to the railroad from Santa Cecilia. "This must be visiting-day at the old homestead."

A big cavalcade was approaching. Bobby thought at first they were troops, but it was too soon for them to arrive, and a moment's inspection showed them to be civilians. By the time Bobby and Lathrop reached the house they had turned into the palm-lined driveway.

Leading the procession was Bobby's old friend Clarence Percy, who, with the aid of an understrapper of equal duskiness but less girth, was herding along no less than four pack mules. Then came a large, smooth-shaven man with iron-gray hair and mustache, dressed in riding-clothes of the most extreme Fifth Avenue cut, riding his horse as if the saddle were covered with eggs and he had made a bet that he wouldn't break them.

Just behind him rode a young man with the seat of a cavalryman and the impassive face of a servant. A few paces behind him came another young man in riding-clothes just a shade more business-like than those of the older man, but sitting his saddle with equal care and delicacy. At his side was riding a girl at the sight of whom Bobby stopped short, his eyes bulging. The next instant he was rushing down the drive toward her.

"Hello there, Gladys!" he cried enthusiastically.

THE girl stared at him, her blue eyes wide with amazement.

"Why, Bobby Worden!" she exclaimed. "What a *sight* you are!"

Then Bobby for the first time in many hours remembered his appearance; clothes torn and muddy, face dirty and unkempt. He was in truth a veritable scarecrow. He grew red, and grinning with embarrassment replied:

"That's the way we get in this country, Gladys. But aren't you glad to see me?"

"It must be a horrid country, then. Of course I'm glad to see you, but I didn't have any idea you were out here. Bobby, this is Mr. Carrol." She turned to the young man, who was an interested auditor.

"Mighty glad to meet you, Mr. Carrol," said Bobby cordially, stretching out his hand.

The immaculate youth hesitated a second

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and returned the greeting. It was a strange land where one was hail-fellow-well-met with such ragamuffins.

Meanwhile Lathrop had gone up to the elderly gentleman, and from the manner of their greeting it was evident that they were not strangers.

" 'Lo, Lathrop," he chopped out. "Help me off this beast. Must have a chair without any seat in it. Rotten transportation here, what? Think I'll stay till you get your railroad built up to me."

"We're particularly glad to see you, Mr. Kennedy," replied Lathrop, as with the assistance of Amador he eased the gentleman's passage to the ground. "Did you get my telegram?"

Mr. Kennedy tested his legs gingerly.

"Wirelessed to the boat," he said. "Reason I was fool enough to rush out here from Santa Cecilia. Brought young Carrol with me. Heavily interested. Also brought niece, Miss Wentworth. Wanted to do a little globe-trotting, so I let her come. Guess she's had enough. S'pose we can all put up here, eh?"

He paused, puffing, as Grace and Mr. Quintard appeared.

There followed a bustle of introductions, of warm-hearted, whole-souled greetings that dwellers in far places are ever wont to extend to travelers of their own kind, of unloading pack mules, of carrying bags and valises to bedrooms.

Finally the newcomers were led within to seek baths, clean clothes, witch-hazel and other soothing lotions. Bobby, too, bethought him that if there were to be a house party it would be well to pay some attention to his own appearance, so he levied on Mr. Quintard for clean linen and proceeded to make himself more presentable. He finished before the rest, and when he emerged found Grace alone in the drawing-room. She was agog with excitement over the new arrivals.

"What is it all?" she asked him. "What does it all mean?"

"I don't know," he replied. "I imagine the old man has something to do with the railroad, and perhaps the younger one too."

"And the girl, Miss Wentworth? You knew her before, didn't you? You know, that seems a strange coincidence."

"Very strange," said Bobby. He was feeling deplorably embarrassed. "She—she's Gladys."

"Oh!" said Grace. She had not heard the name before, but she knew.

An awkward silence was broken by the appearance of Lathrop, clad in white, spick-and-span, and then Grace made some pretext to leave the room.

Lathrop wanted some further details of the events that followed his departure. He did not inform Bobby who Mr. Kennedy was, or in what way he was connected with the railroad, but as soon as he had the required information he went off abruptly.

Meanwhile Grace had gone to her room. For a little while she stood at the window, without looking out, in deep thought. Then, as upon a final resolution, she walked along the corridor to Gladys's room. There she knocked.

"Come in," bade a weary voice.

Gladys was lying on the bed clad in a wonderful old rose kimono, in one hand the inevitable smelling-salts, the other delving about in a box of chocolates from which she was selecting those to her taste by the process of biting and rejecting. On the pillow her mass of wavy hair formed a golden frame for her pretty, pettish face.

"I know I can help you," said Grace, as she entered the room. "Isn't there something I can do?"

"Oh, my dear," answered the other, "there is only *one* thing *any one* can do for me. Find me a flying-machine and take me back to New York. This country is *awfull*" Gladys was always lavish with italics.

"I'm so sorry," said Grace sympathetically. "Perhaps you'll feel better when you are rested. That must have been a hard ride."

"It wasn't only the ride," said Gladys querulously. "I've ridden before—*lots*. It is the whole thing. That *awful* hotel in Santa Cecilia, the people; everything! Everything!" She ended with a gesture of boredom.

"Oh!" said Grace soothingly. "You won't find it so bad after a while. And then it is something to have friends here that you knew at home." She stopped a minute and then went on. "Down here everybody thinks a great deal of Mr. Worden."

"Oh! Bobby," the girl replied, sampling another chocolate. "Yes, Bobby's a good boy."

Grace braced herself. If it were worth doing at all it were worth doing well. With every appearance of enthusiasm she said:

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"You know I really want to tell you how much I congratulate you. He is a splendid fellow."

"*Congratulate* me?" said Gladys, stopping in the middle of a bit and sitting up with astonishment.

"On being engaged to him," went on Grace, her determination to do the thing handsomely taking away her perception.

"What?" exclaimed Gladys. "*Engaged* to Bobby Worden? Really, Miss Quintard, where did you get *that* idea?"

Grace merely stared at her amazedly.

"Of course Bobby and I are awfully fond of each other," continued Gladys. "But, good gracious, my dear, he's only getting sixty dollars a month!"

She dropped back on the pillow again with the air of having given an absolutely sufficient explanation of the state of their hearts.

Grace looked at the girl, as she lay idly fingering her chocolates, a picture of beautiful petulance and boredom.

"I'm sorry I misunderstood," she said, rising. "I am sure you would like to have some broth."

"You are very kind," said Gladys listlessly. "But I am really not hungry."

So Grace returned to her room. But this time she did not stand gazing pensively out of the window. She looked into her glass; and the image she saw there was smiling, eager, without a trace of listlessness or boredom. And then, singing happily the while, she did her hair over carefully and put on the most attractive house gown she possessed.

ORDINARILY Grace dressed herself almost as quickly as a small boy, but now she lingered over each detail of her toilet as if it were of the utmost importance. And from time to time she blushed, for no apparent reason whatever.

Presently she went down and busied herself attending to the unusual household tasks imposed by the sudden incursion of guests. And quite early in the afternoon she returned to her room, still singing, to dress for dinner. Frieda she sent to Gladys.

Bobby, meanwhile, was off consorting with Ed Curtis and Wilson and the other men who had come up from the bridge camp at Arroyo Hondo, recounting his adventures to their huge glee and an accompaniment of good-natured, admiring chaff. A little before dinner Lathrop came from a long interview with Mr. Kennedy and Carrol and bore him off.

"Now, son," said he, when the two of them were perched on the top rail of the corral fence, "I suppose you're as full of curiosity as the whale was of Jonah."

"Bursting," replied Bobby.

"Well," said his chief, "I'll tell you all about it."

He wiped his eyeglasses in a leisurely, deliberate fashion, rolled a cigarette, lit it and blew a cloud of smoke.

"This man Kennedy and the young fellow with him, Carrol, between them come pretty near owning the whole show here—railroad, land and timber interests; everything. For some time the old man has had suspicions about Fessenden. It seems he got on the track of some shady transactions in the fellow's past record. He's a good manager all right, but they were afraid he was crooked.

"Kennedy has known me a long time and, without telling me much about it, he got me this job and gave me private instructions to keep my eyes open. Fortunately he was on his way down here when you sent him that cable, and so here he is, just at the time when we have the goods on Fessenden. Therefore, Fessenden is now fired. His little time check was written out about half an hour ago, thanks to the document we got old Malaquias to sign."

Lathrop blew out another cloud of smoke. It was the longest speech Bobby had ever heard him make.

In a minute Bobby asked the question that was on the tip of his tongue.

"Who is going to get his place?"

"Lathrop," said Lathrop.

"Bully!" said Bobby.

"Now," said Lathrop, "there is just one other thing. This is going to be a real job for me, and naturally I want to make good. It's going to be a big responsibility and I need some one with me I know I can trust. I don't mean I want an Assistant General Manager, but just some green kid with enough sense to know he doesn't know much, whom I can trust to obey orders and do things my way, and occasionally use a little common sense of his own. A sort of confidential private secretary is what it is. The job will pay one hundred and fifty a month. Want it?"

"Mr. Lathrop," said Bobby, "I'd want a

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job like that with you if it paid a dollar and a half a month."

Lathrop laughed as he slid to the ground.

"Son, you'll never be a millionaire if you work on that basis. Oh, by the way," he added, looking at Bobby with a preternaturally solemn face, "you'll also be entitled to a house—and a cook, if you want to start housekeeping."

Bobby laughed and then his face fell.

"No housekeeping for me," he said ruefully.

Lathrop shot him a shrewd glance. Then he said, in businesslike tones—

"We start for Arroyo Hondo at six tomorrow morning."

CHAPTER XIX

WHAT GOOD LUCK CAN DO WHEN IT REALLY TRIES

BOBBY, in spite of the improvement of his fortunes, was feeling disconsolate and hopeless. He dreaded the impending dinner and wished they were starting for the job tonight instead of in the morning.

He dreaded the talk he must have with Gladys. For he must have a long talk with her. Obviously he must tell her of his new job. She would rejoice in his good luck—*their* luck. He pulled a long face as this idea struck him.

In the spacious sitting-room he found his host talking with Mr. Kennedy.

"I can scarcely believe that my dream is to be realized at last," Mr. Quintard was saying. "My life has been wrapped up in this place. I suppose I am sentimental about it. I have longed to express through it my creative ideals—to make it blossom, produce."

"Ought to be big money in it, all right," cut in Mr. Kennedy. He appeared a trifle bored.

"If I were a poet I could explain what it all means to me," said Mr. Quintard somewhat wistfully.

"Great place," confirmed Mr. Kennedy. "But I wouldn't live in this country for a million a month."

Both men seemed somewhat relieved at Bobby's appearance, and the topic shifted to the capabilities of Lathrop.

So effective had been baths and naps and lotions that all the visitors were able to make their appearance for dinner and, with the exception of Bobby, it was a gay little party that gathered in the living-room before the meal was announced.

Gladys was particularly beautiful. Her lassitude of the afternoon had given way to a splendid animation. She chose to scintillate and to pretend that thirty-mile rides were to her an every-day occurrence. If Bobby had observed more closely, he would have seen that she sparkled most when young Carrol was not talking to any one else and was free to notice the sparklings.

Grace was the last to make her appearance, and when she came to the door they all stopped speaking by common impulse. Bobby caught his breath with a sharp gasp. Such a vision of radiant beauty he had never seen. Her masses of light brown hair were drawn back simply from her low, broad forehead.

Her slender neck sloped down to beautiful bare shoulders and arms that might have been used as models to restore the Venus de Milo. And the dress! No mere man could describe it. To Bobby it was simply a bewildering vision of shimmering, clinging yellow, with wisps of smoky gray floating softly over the shoulder and trailing down the skirt.

She greeted them all warmly and, maneuvering through the group, came to where Bobby was standing a little apart from the others. The admiration in his eyes was too frank for her to pretend to ignore it.

"You like it?" she said simply. "You've seen it before, you know—in the box. It's the dress you helped me rescue that first afternoon."

"Like it!" exclaimed Bobby. "That isn't a dress. It's a vision. No wonder you sailed into those robbers."

At the table Bobby found himself seated next to Grace, with Lathrop on the other side of her. Gladys and young Carrol faced them across the table, and Mr. Quintard and Mr. Kennedy sat at either end.

He noted with some little surprise, for he had always thought of the Quintards as living very simply, that there were just as many knives and forks and wine glasses at the places and as many silver things of various shapes and purposes on the table as he had ever seen in Gladys's well appointed house. Indeed, except for the white clothes of the men, the whole scene might have been in New York. Grace read his thought.

"We aren't altogether barbarians, even

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if we are a long way from home," she remarked lightly, as they sat down.

Bobby caught the glitter of Gladys's ring —the ring he had given her—as she was seating herself, and he fervently wished it on Grace. He kept staring glumly at the ring. It seemed to fascinate him.

IT WAS some time, however, before he noticed she was wearing it on her right hand. What did that mean? It gave him a little thrill of hope amidst his bitterness. It made him feel better.

Gladys was chattering vivaciously with Mr. Carrol. But from time to time her eye shot a melting glance at Bobby. He wondered whether she was trying to make Carrol jealous, or himself. But of course she was just teasing him.

His long, moody silence had apparently vexed Grace. She had turned to Lathrop, was listening with seeming fascination to some of his tales of personal adventure. She gave practically all of her attention to Lathrop. Bobby felt neglected and isolated.

He was glad when the liqueurs came and Grace and Gladys departed (after the old-fashioned custom), closely followed by young Carrol. Then the talk shifted to the railroad and the development of the country. But Bobby took little part in the enthusiastic conversation.

Finally they all repaired to the veranda. Grace motioned Lathrop to a seat at her side. Bobby found himself forced into a conversation with Mr. Kennedy. When he broke away, Gladys had vanished. He looked about for her, and saw the gleam of her white dress on the lawn. Then he glanced at Grace, who was still talking gaily with Lathrop. Bobby moodily recalled his chief's frankly expressed admiration for her that day back at Morris's camp.

"I'll take my medicine now," said the young man grimly, and stepped out upon the lawn.

Gladys had vanished into a little Summer house embowered in shrubbery. As Bobby came up a gleam of moonlight revealed her seated with young Carrol bending over her. Bobby just caught the tableau. As they paused outside the young man kissed her full on the lips, and she did not resist.

When Bobby returned to the porch Lathrop was just leaving Grace to exhibit some maps to Mr. Kennedy. Grace noticed the young man's shining eyes.

"Let us go over to the quarters to see how the men who were shot are getting on," she said.

As they walked slowly along the path that led to the improvised hospital, Grace was unaccountably silent.

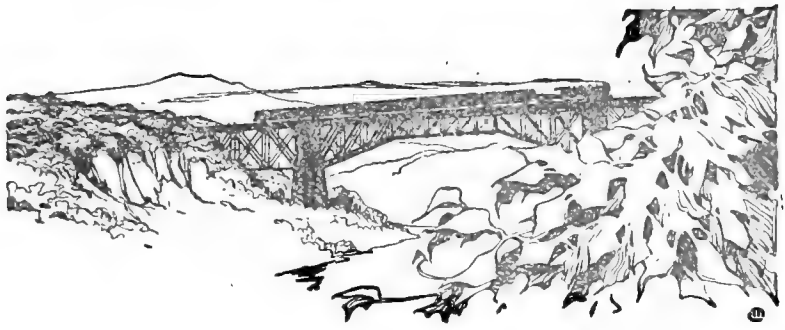
"I'm sorry about that lie I had to tell Rogelio," said Bobby finally. "It hurt awfully. But it couldn't be helped. I knew you'd understand that it was necessary."

"Yes, I understood," she replied. "It hurt me, too," she added after a little, with a break in her voice.

A sudden thrill ran through Bobby. He stopped abruptly.

"Do you mean—" he stammered; "can you mean it hurt you, too, because—it wasn't true?"

The next instant, reading the answer in her eyes, he caught her in his arms.



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Just Bait

A Billy Englehart Story

by H. D. Couzens

JOHNNY CARTER, the trader at Simbo, sat at the door of the storehouse tallying sacks of ivory-nuts. The storehouse was a substantial structure, larger than the usual copra shed, for Simbo was a thriving and profitable station. The building was made of plaited grass and fiber over a framework of rough-hewn scantling of native wood, bound together with cocoa-fiber sennit.

Before the door hung a steelyard scale, and, as the natives hung the bags of nuts on the hook, Johnny jotted down the weight and tally mark in his book, whistling blithely through his teeth and occasionally joking with his helpers in what he fondly believed to be the purest of Solomon Island shore talk, but was actually the crudest beach-de-mar, in the high, nasal singsong of the incorrigible Cockney.

The natives bustled about busily, with a great deal of talk and playful shoving and getting in their own way. They were good-natured enough, and grinned affably at Johnny when he addressed them, in a way that showed genuine liking and good will; yet, cheerful and well disposed toward the trader though they seemed, and Johnny's unconscious and unassumed air of ease and confidence notwithstanding, a stranger would have found something sinister about those natives and gone among them warily.

For these were no handsome, soft-voiced, sleepily smiling Polynesians like the Maoris or Samoans. They were dark and ugly, with a fierce, terrible ugliness, which in some was accented by lip, ear and nose ornaments of bone and shell. Some had their hair fluffed out six inches beyond the scalp; others had bleached theirs with coral lime

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to a hideous dirty-orange color, adding to the grotesque appearance this gave by wearing queer crescent-shaped sunshades of palm leaf on their foreheads. In repose their faces were sullen and bore the stamp of the intractable savage, for they were of the cruel, wild fighting tribes of the Western Pacific.

By mid afternoon the last sack had been weighed and stored, the door of the storehouse closed and locked for the last time till the arrival of the company's schooner, and a throng of natives followed Johnny to the store, crowding and jostling till the small room was packed and the veranda overflowed with them, all eager for a turn to haggle over trade.

In the midst of the hubbub Johnny stood, calmly measuring off gaudily colored print, passing out canned salmon, cheap knives and watches, and the various gimcracks of trade, and ticking debits against the tallies in his book. At supper time he drove them out peremptorily, and in grateful solitude prepared and ate his simple evening meal.

As he strolled up the beach, away from the village, in the brief period between tropical daylight and dark, Johnny was on very good terms with himself. Life was very sweet, Simbo was a fine place, the natives his good friends; and his simple soul rejoiced in the sheer happiness of living.

There were times when Johnny was lonely—desperately so—with no woman about and no white man to talk with in his own tongue, but of late he had been too busy, and this evening was too pleased with the knowledge of work well done. The copra crop had been a famous one; there was more vegetable ivory than ever before, and the storehouse was full to bursting.

All told, his last year's work at the Station would clear him close to a hundred and twenty pounds; and that, to Johnny Carter, was a lot of money—enough to create satisfying visions of the future. As he rambled on he hummed through his nose the fragment of a rollicking tune:

> "Ow, blow ye winds, 'eigh-ow!
> A-rovin' I will gow.
> I'm orf to me love, with a boxin'-glove,
> Ten thousand miles aw'y!"

He had been two years at Simbo, and from the first his life had been peaceful and, at least to Johnny's perception, uneventful. Before that he had been stationed among kindly, indolent Kanakas on an island far north of the Line, where the trade was in sandal wood; and when, through ruthless cutting, the sandal wood was extirpated he returned foot-loose to Sydney.

The station at Simbo was vacant. The last man there had been murdered; so had his predecessor. Both had been hard-drinking, hard-fisted bullies, who discovered, too late, that Solomon Islanders can not be bullied or bluffed by a show of drunken violence.

The manager of the trading company was a man who reduced all values, even of human life, to pounds, shillings and pence; and Simbo ranked high in the scale of values. One type of trader had failed there; here was an opposite at hand.

Johnny Carter had never been drunk in his life. He was small, inoffensive, incapable of picking a quarrel with any one. His loyalty to his friends and the company was doglike; he had a head for trading, and always got along well with the Kanakas. *Ergo*, simple Johnny Carter, with his straggly little beard and birdlike eyes, was ordered to Simbo forthwith.

"It's a blighted shame," the chief clerk confided to Captain Englehart, of the schooner *Huapala*, who chanced to be in the office when the order went forth. "Johnny's an awfully decent little beggar. It's like sending a bloomin' lamb to the slaughter." And Captain Englehart, who knew and liked Johnny, agreed with him. He registered a private resolve to look in on the trader whenever the *Huapala* was near Simbo.

BUT no harm had come to Johnny. The real fate of his predecessors was carefully concealed from him. That they had died—fever or something—was all he knew; and he went about his business as a matter of course, cheerful and unafraid.

The filed and blackened teeth of the natives, their grotesque tattooing and ornamentation, their habits of life, aroused neither his curiosity nor his interest. Their slim, beautifully made spears and arrows, set with blood-chilling rows of shark teeth, their shields and heavy clubs, he regarded as toys. To him they were just Kanakas—a little more "outlandish" than he was accustomed to, but still just Kanakas, whom he was there to trade with; and nothing else.

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When at first they tried to intimidate and worry him into anger or resentment he took it as a joke, never realizing that if he did show anger or resentment he might find one of those dreadful "toy" spears between his ribs. When they endeavored to cheat him, he gently but firmly refused to be cheated. His good nature never faltered and he treated them with unswerving honesty, at times with generosity, distributing presents where he thought they would do the most good.

He was blood brother to the chief, having earned this patent of nobility by the gift of a "Little Daisy" hand sewing-machine to the chief's youngest wife. And so, in time, there had come a kind of friendliness and appreciation between Johnny and "his Kanakas," as he called them, through nothing more than his open simplicity. The suggestion that "his Kanakas" were bloodthirsty devils, with black murder and worse in their hearts, he treated with scorn.

"They're 'armless, I tell you," he informed the supercargo of the schooner who had made the suggestion. " 'Armless as suckin' bybies. I don't s'y, if a man antagonized 'em, or tried to man-'andle 'em, they wouldn't resent it. They're only Kanakas, but they 'ave feelin's; but wot price *me* rysin' a row? I'm 'ere to tryde an' win their good will, an' I've jolly well done it."

You must not think Johnny altogether a fool. Because he really liked his Kanakas he believed he understood them thoroughly, and in some ways he did; for he got their trade with no quibbling and had made himself, in a way, respected. They did not water the copra to make weight, nor put stones in the sacks of ivory-nuts—two forms of petty swindle that are well nigh irresistible.

They kept him supplied with fish, fowls and fruit, and he was welcome at any house at the village. He knew they were a fighting tribe and had occasional "scraps" with the hillmen, between whom and the shore people there is always a lasting, bitter feud. If it amused them to throw their toy spears and squib off their trade needle guns and pot-metal fowling-pieces, that was their affair.

That there were dreadful, revolting features to these fights he never suspected. That was one reason why Johnny had dwelt so long in peace. He did not know too much.

HE EXTENDED his walk along the beach beyond his usual limit, humming his tune, thoroughly pleased with himself. As he rounded a point of rocks, where the beach formed an angle, he came to a sudden halt, with an exclamation of surprise.

A young woman, clad solely in her brown epidermis, was wringing water from her long, black hair. She turned at his exclamation, regarded him curiously but without embarrassment for a moment; then as he came toward her wheeled about and, with a laugh that displayed two rows of white, even teeth, fled swiftly down the beach and plunged into the water.

It was deep close to the shore and as she swam out she flashed another gleaming, tantalizing smile at him over her shoulder. Johnny addressed her in his choicest beach-de-mar, but she pretended not to hear and glided about with the ease of a young seal; not, however, without a very conscious display of the grace of her dainty body.

She was a hill girl, he saw at once; young, and pretty enough to be very beautiful in the eyes of Johnny Carter. Like many of the bush people, she was lighter than those of the shore. Her figure, of recent maturity, was lithe and round and supple, and her features, as regular and fine as those of any Samoan beauty, were unmarred and undisfigured by tattooing or ornaments.

Johnny had taken no mate in his two years at Simbo, and had been chaffed about it by his friends of the schooner.

"My word!" he had explained, referring to the women of the village, "no double 'arness for me with one of *that* lot. They're too 'orrid ugly. They wear copper and bone and things in their fyces. An' some of the bones are 'uman bones, too. Think of that! Think of a bloomin' 'elpmyte with dried finger bones stickin' out around 'er, like 'at pins, and a necklace of 'uman teeth! Ow, no! My word, no!"

This girl was different. Johnny sat down in the sand and continued to talk to her. As he talked the cockles of his heart, as the saying goes, warmed to her more and more, and when she replied to him, as she did after a while, in a voice as sweet and mellow as her laugh, he felt all at once the loneliness of the past two years.

Neither could make much of the other's speech. Johnny knew nothing of the hill dialect, but, with all the persuasiveness in

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his power he begged her to come out—and at last she came.

SHE came again the following evening. What brought her to the shore in the first place he could not learn, nor did he care. She was there; she had come to him in his loneliness, and that was enough. Three evenings he made love to her in the moonlight, and then he took her to his house.

Now Johnny knew the rules of the game. Hill and shore people must not mate, on pain of death. No such alliance among the natives themselves would be tolerated. Johnny, living as he did on the shore, was virtually a shore man himself. He knew this, considered it gravely for a time, then dismissed the subject from his mind. He was a white man. These dark people were his friends, but also his inferiors. They would not hold him amenable to their heathen codes and customs, and, moreover, *he* had no feud with the hill people. That alone exempted him. He would give his friends a feast, with plenty of gin, and it would all blow over.

That is where Johnny Carter made a very sad and terrible mistake.

II

TWO months later the schooner *Huapala* cast anchor off the station and hove short on her cable. A boat put off, full of armed sailors, and when it had grounded Billy Englehart stepped ashore and walked briskly up the beach to the trader's house.

"Oh, Johnny!" he called, as he stamped across the veranda. "Come out of that, you lazy dog, and let's have a look at you!"

There was no immediate response, but presently a man shuffled out from the inner room and stood yawning and blinking in the sunlight, evidently aroused from an afternoon nap. He was a tall, tallowy creature with an unkempt shock of fulvous hair and beard. He wore a suit of disreputable pajamas and smelled strongly of gin.

"Hello!" exclaimed Englehart. "Where's Johnny?"

"Who? Johnny Carter? God knows. Mon, he's dead an' bur-r-ied this two months. An' who might you be that's askin'?"

"Captain Englehart, of the *Huapala*. I take it you're Johnny's successor, then?"

"Aye! For a time, that is. I'm Jock Stewart, trader in char-r-ge. Will ye coom in, Captain, an' have a bit of a nip?"

Englehart accepted the invitation and a glass of tepid gin and water.

"What killed Johnny?" he asked, as he filled his pipe.

"Fever."

"H'm! Who says so?"

"The natives. Of coorse their wor-r-d is little good, they knowin' naught of medicine. At ony rate, Johnny's gone; there's no uncertainty aboot thot."

"Suppose you tell me what you know about it."

"There's little to tell. A while back the schooner put in here to take on Johnny's trade, and found him gone and the store looted. The skipper and Tomlinson, the supercargo, had a confab with the chief an' coom aboard purty solemn.

"Ye see, we'd met Mr. Evans, the meessionary, up at Malaita, an' he told us Johnny'd been gettin' married; but not a wor-r-d of this nor onything else could they get from the natives, save that he'd sickened an' died, vurry sudden—of the bur-r-nin' sickness.

"Bein' aboard, on my way to Sydney, an' out of a job for a time, I offered to take charge till they brought up another mon from Sydney, an' after a deal of argufyin' among themselves they agreed to it; but losh, mon! The station's dead. Not a soul has coom in to look at the trade. Times I see them prowlin' around near by, but they run off, as shy as hares, when I try to make talk. Either they want no trade or the station's tabooed. At any rate, 'tis all-fired lonesome."

"Tabooed!" Englehart sat up suddenly. "Why should the station be tabooed?"

"I dinna ken. 'Tis all Greek to me. I'm only tellin' ye how it is. I've thought they might be shy because they were fond of Johnny and were goin' slow aboot gettin' acquented with me."

Englehart went back to the schooner in a thoughtful mood. He told his mate what he had learned of the fate of Johnny Carter.

"Now, Jim," said he, "we ought to clear out of here and be off about our business, but I'm not goin' to do it. There's something fishy about this business. That poor little devil didn't die of fever, you can lay to

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that. There's been some kind of hocus pocus afoot, and we'll just let our mudhook rest, keep a sharp lookout tonight, and see what we can learn in the morning. I misdoubt we'll have to do some tall tail-twisting to get at anything like the truth; but, Jim, if there's been any dirty work we'll show these natives a whole bag of tricks."

The *Huapala* had arrived late in the afternoon, and night fell soon after Englehart returned aboard. At about nine in the evening he and Carncross stood leaning against the rail, talking, when suddenly the mate gripped his arm.

"Look!" he whispered, pointing off into the darkness. "What's that?"

There was no moon, but a host of stars was shining; and after a moment's casting about Englehart saw, not fifty yards away, the dark head of a swimmer. It came on steadily toward the schooner. Carncross drew and cocked his revolver.

"No need of that, Jim," muttered Englehart; "there's only one of 'em."

They stood crouching while a slim arm twined about a rail stanchion, a lithe, dark body mounted the rail and dropped noiselessly to the deck. Both men sprang at the same instant and both simultaneously gave a cry of surprise and stepped back, for the swimmer was a woman.

Englehart still held firmly to her wrist.

"Bring a lantern," he commanded.

She stood unresisting and immovable while Carncross brought a light; and they saw that she was young and slender, and possessed of an uncommon, wild beauty. She was nude save for a scant girdle of dried grass, and a small, thin packet, like a scapular covered with oiled silk, hung pendent on her breast from a necklace of fiber.

There was an undefinable sleekness about her, like a kitten nearly matured, and her deep black eyes had a greenish shine in the shifting light of the lantern. Instinctively she turned to Englehart.

"You Cap'n?" she asked, "you flem (friend) to Johnny—trader fellow?"

"Yes," said Englehart. "Good friend."

"All right. I wife to him. Misi-fellow make-do. I speak."

But though she did speak, volubly, it was in her own tongue, of which Englehart and Carncross could understand no more than a word here and there. She seemed to have exhausted her scant store of pidgin English.

Some of the crew had pressed as far aft as they dared and Englehart called to one of them, a Malaita boy, to interpret. The woman followed them into the cabin with a slight hesitation in which there was more of feline wariness than shyness. She opened the packet on her breast and took from it a folded paper which she handed to Englehart.

"I wife to Johnny," she repeated. "Misi-fellow make-do."

Englehart looked it over and with raised eyebrows passed it to Carncross in silence. It was a certificate, signed by Mr. Evans, the missionary, showing that he had, something over two months since, united the girl, Maré, and John Carter in lawful marriage, two of his boat's crew acting as witnesses.

Then the girl, through the indifferent medium of the interpreter, told her story. She had gone to Johnny's house because he was her man and her heart's desire, and the next day the missionary, having come in his cutter on his periodical visit, married them at Johnny's request.

The villagers had tabooed Johnny because he had married a hill girl, but they would not harm him while the misi was there with his men; else he would send white men to punish them. The misi had stayed four days at the village, holding prayer-talk, and left only when they swore to him that they would not harm Johnny or his wife, and would raise the taboo.

But when he had gone she became afraid. She had begged and prayed for Johnny to go away with her into the bush, but he would not go. He would not leave his station and his people. And then they had come for him.

They surrounded the house, and three men came in and, when he spoke them kind words, stabbed him to death with spears. They tried to kill her too, and she barely escaped with her life. And then—and then——

THE girl's head drooped. She hid her face in her hands and shivered violently. She talked between sobs, incoherently, and it was some minutes before the interpreter could gather material for translation.

"She say, he reported at last, "they make big fire—heat stones—then cook long pig."

Carncross swore explosively. Englehart's face grew stern and set.

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"The cursed brutes! By ——, Jim, they'll pay for that!" His fist crashed down on the table. "Murder was bad enough, but at that Johnny was taking a long chance and he knew it.

"The little fool was juggling with fire when he took up with this—this baggage here"—he glanced at the girl with a scowl so savage that she recoiled—"but to think of those fiends cooking and—— Ugh! Jim, it's horrible."

He turned to the interpreter.

"Ask her if she knows who the three men were who killed Johnny."

The girl nodded slowly. She seemed a trifle uneasy and flustered. Haltingly, as if she recalled them with difficulty, she gave the names of three men. They were the leading fighting-men of the tribe, one of them the son of the chief, and their names were known and dreaded by all of the hill tribe. She arose abruptly and, with the lithe wariness of a feline jungle creature, moved toward the companion.

"I go!" she said suddenly, and darted up the steps. When they reached the deck she was already several yards from the schooner, swimming, without a sound, toward the shore.

Englehart paced back and forth uneasily, scowling darkly.

"Jim," said he bitterly, "this is a rotten business! I swear there are times when I feel like coming heeled for it and blowing a lot of these foul brutes off the map. I'd as soon abolish a tribe of man eaters as I would a nest of snakes. As for the three who killed Johnny—I'll attend to their case, sharp and sudden, in the morning. And, Jim"—he gritted his teeth—"I'd give a heap right now to get these hands on that officious, meddlesome ass of a missionary!"

III

EARLY next morning two surf boats, full of men, put off from the schooner and made for the beach. Between each man's feet was a loaded rifle, and in the bow of one boat stood a brass cannon, charged with buckshot and covered over loosely with a piece of canvas.

Englehart hurried to the trader's house. Within, on a table, a lamp was still burning, the flame of its charred wick a red spark through the blackened chimney. Stewart, his arms on the table and his head in his arms, was snoring, a half-emptied gin bottle at his elbow.

Englehart prodded him savagely in the ribs with the butt of his rifle. The trader grunted, raised his head and looked up, loose-lipped and bloodshot of eye, leering drunkenly.

"Eh! Wha's that?" he demanded stupidly.

"I'll give you a piece of advice, my man," said Englehart wrathfully. "Stop swilling gin and go soak your thick head if you expect to live much longer."

"I want no advice from you nor ony mon. My ways are my own!" responded the Scotchman truculently. "An' ye'll be so kind as to be off on your own business, Cap—Cap'n Englehart!"

"Very well," said Englehart, turning on his heel. "I've served you fair warning. I don't care a hoot in Hades what becomes of *you*, you half-witted, driveling donkey, but I hate to see another white man messed up into long pig, like Johnny Carter. I wonder you've lived so long, as it is. Stay here and soak your skin full, for all of me."

Stewart rose to his feet, his eyes staring and his brow shining with sweat.

"Wh—wha's that you said about Johnny Carter?"

Englehart turned in the doorway.

"You heard me!"

"Lord ha' mercy! I half suspected they killed him, but—but not that! Captain—mon, dear—I'll go with ye. I'll not bide here another day!"

"If you bide another hour you'll catch it; I'll tell you that! If you value your hide you'll clear out and get down to the boats, my man!"

Englehart, with half a dozen armed men, went trotting off down the beach in the direction of the village. At the outskirts they halted, and the Malaita boy was sent forward by Englehart to locate the whereabouts of a certain three inhabitants. It proved an easy matter for the boy, squatting beside the women busy with morning fires and exchanging bantering gossip, to glean the information without arousing suspicion.

Then Englehart acted swiftly. Before the drowsy village suspected what was taking place, he and his men were tramping off up the beach at the double quick, three native men in the lead with rifle muzzles prodding into the small of their backs. But

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before long there was an ominous yelling as the men of the village scurried about, spreading the alarm and hastily arming themselves.

At a point opposite his boats Englehart halted his men and confronted the three natives. Three repeating rifles were brought and he laid aside his own weapon and deliberately loaded the magazines, the captives looking on curiously.

"These guns," said he, when he had done, "are yours!"

For a brief instant the eyes of the mystified young chief glistened. Repeating rifles were things to be prized and cherished above all else.

He half stretched out an arm, but quickly withdrew it. There was something in Englehart's face that lent a chill to the proceedings. Englehart handed the rifles to one of his men, gave an order, and the man ran up the beach a hundred yards or so, laid the rifles on the sand and hastened back.

A chorus of voices was growing momentarily louder. Stewart, the trader, came flying down from the store with a hastily gathered armful of effects.

"They're comin', the whole pack," he gasped, "an' they're ragin' mad."

He splashed into the sea and flung himself into a boat. Englehart's men, at his order, scrambled into their seats, Carncross behind the brass cannon. Englehart, facing the three men alone, picked up his rifle and stepped back a pace or two.

"The guns are yours—to kill me with," said he. "When you reach them, turn and shoot at me. If you aim only at me, my men won't hurt you. If you kill me, the guns are yours. I, too, will shoot!"

"Why-for so?" cried the amazed young chief, "I no sabby this kind talk."

Englehart's cold eye gleamed mercilessly.

"You make pay now for Johnny Carter," he said grimly.

For a moment the young chief looked at him wonderingly, a dawning fear in his eyes. On the same impulse he and his two companions glanced at the point where the rifles lay. Above the beach was a wide belt of knee-high sea fennel. For a hundred yards in any direction there was not so much as a rock or bush to which they might dodge for shelter. Englehart grinned sardonically.

"You can run if you want to." He cocked his rifle. "Try it! Now be off! Right about! March!"

The forerunners of the crowd from the village were breaking through into the clearing, but between them and the three warriors stood Englehart, his rifle menacing, his finger on the trigger. Suddenly all three, with a wild shout, dashed off at a run, twisting, dodging, their heads low between their shoulders. They flung themselves on the rifles and, turning about, fired almost simultaneously.

The South Sea Islander seldom grasps the theory of a hind sight. That is why the three bullets flew so high that Englehart, standing immovable, could barely hear them humming overhead. The men ran forward, crouching, knelt and fired again. As they advanced a second time Englehart's rifle flew to his shoulder and the young chief pitched forward on his face, a bullet through his brain. Again Englehart fired and the next man stumbled, with a cry, clutching his abdomen.

"Too low!" growled Englehart. "—— the glare!" He threw out the empty shell, blinking, for the sun had been squarely in his eyes.

A quick glance along the sights showed him that the third man had had enough. Snatching the wounded man's rifle he turned and ran for his life up the beach. Englehart's finger was on the trigger for a flying shot, when there leaped up from the sea fennel a lithe, brown figure, that seemed fairly to launch itself through the air upon the fleeing man.

A HAND rose and descended, swift as light, with something that gleamed; the man wilted to a heap in the sand and the hill girl, kneeling on his supine body, drove the knife home viciously, savagely, again and again. She flew to the wounded man and, with the same furious vindictiveness, plied her weapon repeatedly till his writhings ceased. Then, without a glance behind, she turned and sped inland.

The crowd of natives, spellbound for the moment, broke into a chorus of yells. A spear skimmed by an inch from Englehart's ribs as he made for the boats; then a small swarm of spears and needle guns and antiquated fowling-pieces bellowed as the mob came surging down the beach.

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The sailors fired a volley as Englehart leaped into the stern of a boat and Carncross, tearing off the cannon's jacket, trained the gun on the thickest of the crowd and pulled the lanyard. Half a dozen men fell, and the howls of the rest proved that as many more were wounded.

A moment later the beach was deserted. Englehart and Carncross urged the rowers on, for Englehart, glancing over his shoulder, saw a line of dusky forms back among the trees, racing toward the village.

"We're not through with this yet, Jim," he called. "Pull, you men! Pull like the very blazes!"

Far out they could see the wind on the surface of the sea, but the schooner, her sails flapping and booms rolling lazily, was in the lee of the land with barely breeze enough to give her steerage way. Already they could see long canoes, filled with savages, putting off down the beach and by the time they had tripped the anchor and got way on the schooner the whole fleet was sweeping toward them.

The *Huapala*, her booms out wing and wing, crawled along in the light air like a drifting log. She had covered no more than half the distance to the wind zone when the first canoes were almost upon her.

In their fierce eagerness the paddlers brought them too close and a volley from the rifles, with a charge of buckshot from the little cannon added, caused them to drop back till the fleet was assembled for a combined rush. Once surrounded by the canoes, the crew of the schooner would quickly be overpowered by sheer force of numbers.

Englehart stood at the wheel, maneuvering for every ounce of wind. Behind them the massed fleet was overhauling them in a body and Englehart's teeth were set hard on his pipe stem. A hand grasped his arm.

"Skippur-r!" It was the hoarse voice of the Scotch trader. "Skippur-r, have ye ony dynamite?"

Englehart cocked an eye in approval.

"Good! You'll be a man yet, Stewart. In the trade room; the red box. Here's the key!"

In those days nearly all traders carried a small stock of dynamite, which was in demand among the islanders for killing fish. Stewart disappeared below, reappearing presently with an armful of explosive and a ball of twine. He bound the sticks together in bunches of three or four and twisted the fuses. He had completed half a dozen of these bombs as the fleet came up. Carncross and the men were firing desperately. The Scotchman lit the fuses of one of his bombs and stood watching them sizzle and spit as a boy does a giant fire cracker.

"Look out, men! Lie down all!" he yelled suddenly and flung the bomb into the nearest canoe, at the same time dropping to the deck. The explosion was terrific, and the result so appalling that for a moment there was a lull in hostilities from the shock to the nearer canoes.

They came on again at once, their occupants yelling madly; but the *Huapala* had found the wind. Her sails bellied out and strained at the sheets and a gurgling song began at the bow as she drew steadily away from her pursuers.

But Englehart, with ideas of his own, immediately checked her way. He threw the schooner into the wind till the foreboom jibed and then kept her, with slack sheets and shaking luffs, loafing along at a pace that was only a trifle faster than the canoes, glancing back occasionally to gage their distance.

And the canoes came on. It was not till a quarter of an hour later, when they were well out in the wind zone, that the rage of the savages subsided sufficiently for them to see the futility of a stern chase. The paddlers rested. And it was then that Englehart yelled:

"Now, Jim! Ready about! Lively!" and spun the wheel hard over.

The schooner heeled as she took the wind and, close-hauled, sped down toward the huddled canoes. Two of them she struck amidships as she passed, reducing them to splintered wreckage, while the crew kept up a continuous rifle fire and Carncross loosed the cannon's deadly charge at close range. But it was Stewart and his dynamite who wrought the real destruction. Some of the canoes tried frantically to make fast as they swept by and into two of these the Scotchman coolly pitched bombs that wrought havoc sickening to see.

Once again the schooner came about and ran through the fleet, now fleeing toward the shore, and as they passed Stewart hurled another bomb that blew a canoe and its occupants to pieces. Englehart headed the schooner off shore and relinquished the wheel to one of the crew.

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"That's enough—we'll be going," said he. "No use overdoing it."

A little later Carncross came up and handed him the glass.

"Look yonder, Billy," he said with a grin. "One of the audience has enjoyed the show."

He pointed to a rocky headland a mile or so down the coast. With the naked eye Englehart could see, silhouetted against the sky, a madly leaping, bounding figure; through the glass he saw it was a woman, dancing, in utter wild abandon, the war dance of the hill men.

IV

TOMLINSON, the supercargo, and the grizzled schooner Captain, just in from a voyage, sat with the manager and chief clerk of the trading company.

The supercargo's eyes were shining, for he had a story to tell, the telling having devolved upon him as being more fluent of speech than the rugged, dour old skipper. Gossip is the *sauce piquante*, the caviare, of South Sea life, and the man with a really big story is excusable if he feels himself a bit self-important.

"We heard it from Evans, the missionary," Tomlinson was saying. "Ran into him at Guvutu. He got the whole Simbo yarn straight on his next visit. It's something like a police novel, and something like a needle gun that backfires and blows a man's eye out.

"It's all topsy turvy. You know what Englehart did there in revenge for Johnny Carter. Well, if Billy ever learns the truth it will worry him the rest of his life. He's one of the fellows who don't as a rule go off half cocked, and what's more he has something resembling a conscience, and it would hurt. Not that it wasn't all right. The brutes deserved all they got, and that girl's testimony would have fooled the Lord Chief Justice himself."

"Tell the yarn, man!" growled Captain Parish. "Stop beatin' about and about."

'Why, you see," continued Tomlinson, "it wasn't the shore people who did for Johnny at all. It was the hill men. This is what really happened, according to Evans.

"When Carter brought his girl home the village tabooed him and held a council. The old chief stuck up for him. Johnny'd given his wife a hand sewing-machine and it had tickled the old boy to death, but they overruled him and passed the death sentence on Johnny.

"They admitted this freely. He had broken the rules of the game, and must pay the forfeit. They would have killed him as an act of justice, but they wouldn't have eaten him, as he wasn't an enemy—another rule.

"Then the missionary happened in and upset their plans for a time. As soon as he left they started for the station to get Johnny, but he wasn't there. The girl had led him off into the bush, by some blandishment or other; the hill men got him, and——"

"What! The girl, his wife, led him——"

"Wait! This part is straight enough, for the hill men boasted of it when the shore men raided them soon after—too late to save poor Johnny from the oven.

"The hill men hadn't won a battle for over two years. The tribe wasn't strong enough. They were hungry for long pig, and naturally they preferred a white man when one was available. Johnny was a shore man and a natural enemy. So they sent the woman down——"

The chief clerk started and shuddered.

"Sent the woman down! Good Lord!"

"Yes. It's a loathsome business, but it's the way they got Johnny. Some character to that woman—what? Then she boarded Billy's schooner with that fool certificate to back her story, hoping he'd knock everlasting tar out of the shore tribe, and that's what Billy did. Most any white man would have, after seeing that certificate."

"But the girl was his wife. She'd lived with him. Do you mean to say——"

"The girl," rumbled the schooner Captain through his beard, "was bait—just bait, that's all!"

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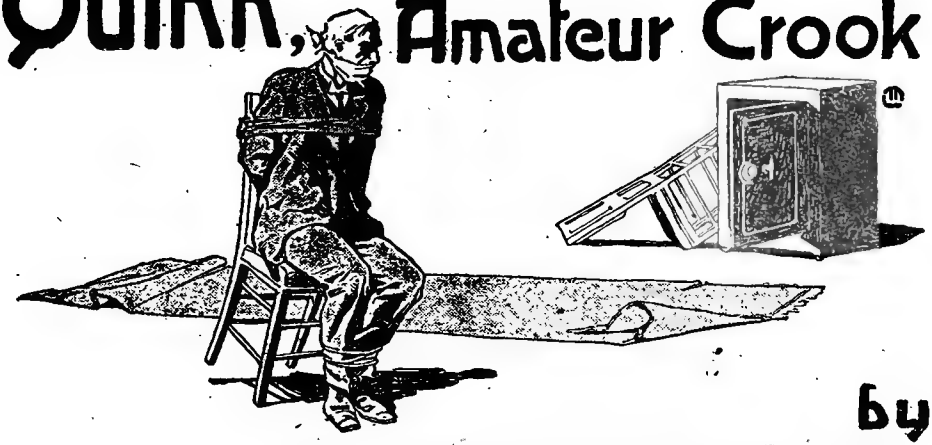
Quinn, Amateur Crook



by Charles B. Couchman

QUINN, the butler, made no noise as he carefully turned the combination of the safe, opened the steel door and took out the package of money he had seen his employer, Mr. Ellis, put there a few hours before.

With equal care he stole into the library and, pulling out a certain volume in a remote corner, carefully stowed the package away and restored the book to its place.

He then returned to the room where the safe was and began arranging the furniture, evidently with a definite end in view. A window in the rear was unfastened and opened. The lock on this window was antiquated and Quinn knew that it could be turned from the outside by skilful manipulation.

To assist others in arriving at the same conclusion he scraped his knife blade carefully against the wood where the two sashes met next to the lock. It took some time to do this to his entire satisfaction. When he had finished he was sure that the manner of entrance of the supposed thief would be evident to any investigator.

Quinn was very deliberate, for he knew it would be several hours before Mr. Ellis returned; yet he lost no time through any uncertainty. He knew exactly what had to be done, and he did it with care, as became a good butler. He was very cool and wondered just a little at his coolness. He had feared somewhat that when the time came he would be nervous.

He was thankful that he was not, for he knew now that he would succeed. His coolness had been the uncertain element. He had studied the problem too long to fail, if he did not bungle.

Slipping out to the hall, he picked up a pair of Mr. Ellis's boots and returned to the window. Here he stepped from his slippers into the boots and walked on tiptoe to the safe. There was just a little mud on the boots; for a light shower had fallen before Mr. Ellis came in, and they left tracks accordingly.

He tramped several times in front of the safe and then around a spot nearer the window; after which, he returned to the window, climbed through and dropped to the ground. Here he walked directly across the rear lawn to the alley, which was paved and would of course not carry footprints; then returned and drew himself up through the window, letting his boot scrape intentionally against the sill. Here he reëxchanged the boots for his slippers and carried the boots back to their original position in the hall.

There were rope portières between the hall and the library, and these he tore down with a yank. Pulling a heavy chair into the spot between safe and window about which he had walked with the muddy boots, he laid the portière on it and placed another chair on its side in front of the first.

Then came the part in the affair he least relished; but he did not hesitate at this

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either. Picking up a rough cane which always stood in a rack beside the stairs, he took a firm grip upon it and struck his head a glancing blow.

In his determination to see the thing through correctly he may have underestimated the weight of his stick or overestimated the resistant power of his head, for there and then the termination of his earthly affairs came very near indeed—so near, in fact, that he might have thought it had come, had he been able to think at all.

When he rallied from the shock he found that he had slipped down easily to the floor by the stairs. What he could not quite decide, though, was whether he had really been unconscious or not; and, if so, for how long? How much time had he lost? Would he be able to go on now or not?

He determined that he would go on. He must. He had gone too far now to back out. Thus far appearances might uphold the story he would tell, but would not absolutely prove it; and prove it he must. There must not be left the least possibility of doubt.

There was such a possibility now. He must go farther. There was one thing that he felt sure would complete the proof of his innocence and convince the most skeptical that there must have been another person present who was responsible for the crime. That thing he would do, despite that strange sensation in his head.

First, though, he wondered if the blow he had given himself would be convincing. It was harder than he had intended, and he was sure that it was as hard as he could have given himself and live to tell his story, but it had scarcely broken the scalp. It was not bleeding, and apparently it had not even raised a bump!

It was very disappointing. To have to suffer from such a self-inflicted blow and yet gain nothing from it seemed very unjust indeed. Quinn was determined to do the job well. He would be well paid if he succeeded. The little package contained not less than ten thousand dollars. He knew exactly where he could hide it permanently, and long afterward he could deposit it a little at a time, just as if he were saving it from his salary, and no suspicion whatever would attach to it.

He felt again of his head. It was aching horribly, but people might not believe that. They could not see the ache. There must be something more tangible.

He opened his pocket knife and with the sharp blade made a small cut on the middle finger of his left hand, where he knew it would bleed freely. It did. Holding his hand above his head, he let the blood drip into his hair where he had administered the blow. Putting away the knife, he squeezed his finger to increase the flow of blood until his head was gory for an inch about the spot. He let a little trickle down his forehead in one place. He thought it might help.

Perhaps the bleeding relieved the blood pressure on his brain, for his head seemed a little better. Perhaps it was because he had two hurts to divide his attention. He must proceed now with the work in hand.

STANDING on the bottom step of the stairs, he looked about to see if all was ready. It seemed to be. Pulling out his revolver, he fired a shot through the panel of the library folding door and tossed the gun on to a near-by couch. Then, hurrying to the safe, he extinguished the tallow candle which had been burning there, seated himself in the chair and rapidly began tying himself therein.

This was to be his masterpiece, the final proof which would put to shame any lingering suspicion that any one might feel toward him. He had practised until he had devised a scheme of so tying himself that any one would be willing to swear he had been tied by some other person well versed in the gentle art of tying non-untiable knots.

In a very few minutes he was lying gagged and inert, absolutely helpless. In his practise he had always left a certain knot unfinished. Now every one was completed hard and fast, and he knew he could not possibly release himself. This peculiar last knot was the final clue to the unknown marauder, and he knew exactly the crook who would be accused of binding him. He had planned that also.

He had not expected the shot he had fired to attract any attention. The room was at the rear of the house; the house was far from the street; and the street was very likely to be deserted at such an hour. Nevertheless he had not overlooked the theory that the unexpected is the thing that usually happens; and, to be prepared for an immediate response to the shot, he had lost no time in getting himself trussed into helplessness.

The haste seemed to have been needless,

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for moment succeeded moment and nothing happened. Once he thought he heard a slight noise back of him, but it was probably some rustling caused by the breeze through the open window. Again came a sound like the latching of a door at the front of the house; but that was also the wind, no doubt.

Just then it occurred to him that if a real burglar should come things would be in great shape to receive him. The window was wide open and the guard hopelessly bound. He consoled himself, however, by remembering that such a burglar would get nothing of value for his pains; for the safe seldom contained anything worth while, and the treasure it had contained tonight was safely hidden from any burglar.

But suppose that burglar, finding him so well fixed for the purpose, should try torture to make him tell where the money was? Quinn did not feel tonight that he could stand very much more.

But no—that idea was foolish. No possible burglar would imagine Quinn knew where the money was. He would realize that another of the profession had beaten him to it and had overpowered the butler in a terrible struggle before making off with the spoil. That is what every one would think. That is what they must think. He had watched and waited for many months for this chance to make a "haul" worth while. Now that it had come he felt he had taken full advantage of it—in fact, had gone to the extremes of caution to take advantage of it.

There was a fierce pain in his head and he was beginning to feel sick. He wondered if Mr. Ellis would reward him for having risked his life in guarding the money. He tried to put his hand to his head, but of course could not raise it.

Suddenly another fear smote him—a fear that he might lose consciousness, might even die, trussed up here with no way of giving himself aid! How could he get help? What good would all his precautions do him if he died now? The money would be finally found where he had hidden it and the crime fastened upon him despite all he had done.

He must not die! He struggled at the bonds until they cut his wrists and ankles, but the struggling only made his head worse. He was very dizzy. Things were going around and around. He must get help! How?

Oh, yes! He remembered. He had provided a way for that also, but this nausea had driven it from his head for the moment. He could get help when he wanted it. The remembrance cleared his mind.

But wait! Before he called he must go over everything to make sure he had not overlooked a point. Quinn was a devoted student of detective literature. He knew all methods from that of Sherlock Holmes to that of Detective Burns. What was more to the point tonight, he knew the character of the police officers who would probably be called on this case. He knew what crooks were in the public eye just then, knew their supposed methods and characteristics, and had utilized that knowledge.

He knew also that every one who commits a crime is said to leave clues—clues that will lead an expert directly back to their originator. "Therefore," he had reasoned, "leave plenty of clues, but see that they *point the other way!*" He had planned accordingly. He went mentally over the ground with great care.

"There are plenty of clues here," he continued in thought, "but they will not lead to me. Even if they should, I have here a very good alibi."

And he tightened his muscles again against the bonds and felt their grip with satisfaction.

"I think I have done all that I can, so here goes!"

In front of the chair in which he sat was another which he had carefully overturned there earlier in the evening. By a twist of his feet in the rungs of this he swung it against the telephone desk which stood near.

Twice he swung it before the telephone toppled over, the receiver falling from the hook, thus connecting with the central switchboard. He was ready for help, and he preferred that the police should come before Mr. Ellis did. They would be more convinced by releasing him themselves than by simply hearing afterwards about how he had been tied.

MISS CELESTE JONES was engaged in several occupations at once, but was such an adept that no one of them seemed to interfere seriously with the others.

One hand was making fairly regular trips from a dainty bonbon box to a somewhat daintier mouth (also suggestive of bonbons); the other hand, with equal regularity,

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turned the pages of the latest best-selling detective story. Her eyes, bright and vivacious despite the hour, flitted shuttle-like across the pages; her lower jaw of classic cut was less regular in its motion, pausing in suspense at times in unconscious sympathy with the characters in the story, then speedily recovering the lost time as the events chased one another rapidly through the narration.

All these acts were punctuated at times by a tiny light that flickered on the switchboard before her, the quick action of her right arm as she plugged in in response, and her mechanical, "Number, please!" that accompanied the action.

"Number, please! Number, please!"

She had said it three times now, and she glanced again at the tiny light as if it might explain the tardiness of the party it represented. "Number, please!" she repeated patiently, and then leaned forward as if listening intently.

She could hear faint sounds over the wire —sounds to which she would have paid no attention ordinarily, merely considering them part of the continuous, half-understandable jargon that constantly hums through a Central's receiver; but these sounds fitted so into the story that she was surprised and listened more intently.

"Help! Help! Police!" she made out of the muffled, almost unintelligible voice.

"Where?" she answered.

"Help! Help!" she faintly caught the answer as if the person speaking were some distance from the 'phone. Then she heard a crash as of overturning furniture.

Hastily she grabbed the numerical list and ran down it until she came to the number indicated by the light.

"Ellis, E. R., 4015 Westchester Road," she read.

She plugged "37," the Police call, and got the nearest station. And in a moment three officers were speeding to 4015 Westchester Road, and Miss Celeste Jones was several pages farther in her story; and several more bonbons had passed through the ruby gateway, to be seen no more.

The officers arrived simultaneously with Mr. Ellis—a part of the program not planned by Quinn, the butler, but which was entirely agreeable to him. One man was sent to guard the rear, another was left in front; and Sergeant Dannigan entered the porch with Mr. Ellis.

"What's all this about?" Ellis demanded.

Dannigan told him what he knew of the Central girl's story.

"The money!" gasped Ellis, fumbling at the door with his latch key.

"Be careful," Dannigan warned, as he stepped in and turned his electric searchlight about the hall. There was nothing here to excite attention, and they turned into the near-by rooms. It was Dannigan who heard a groan and came upon Quinn neatly bound in the chair.

Quinn recognized him and was well pleased. If any police officer read and believed the popular newspaper accounts of crooks and their ways, it would be Dannigan.

"Here! Quick!" the sergeant called, and Ellis dashed into the room. When he comprehended that it was Quinn before him he grabbed at the ropes to release him.

"Wait!" cried Dannigan, holding him back.

"But this is Quinn, my butler!"

"I can't help who it is. Turn on the lights. I want to see those knots before they are untied—or cut," he added as he looked at one. "Sometimes we learn a great deal from things like this. We may even be able to tell who did this job just by examining the way this man is tied."

"Help!" gasped Quinn feebly.

"Then for Heaven's sake take that gag out of his mouth anyway," cried the thoroughly excited Ellis—and Dannigan obeyed.

"Poorly gagged!" commented Dannigan. "Looks like they didn't care if he did holler a little."

"Tell us about it, quick! What happened?" demanded Ellis.

"Wait!" murmured Quinn as if too weak to say more.

"Hurry, Dannigan! We must find out what happened!"

Just then Ellis caught sight of the open door of the safe, which he had overlooked in his surprise at finding his butler in such a predicament. He rushed to it and looked inside.

"Gone, of course!" he exclaimed. "I should have known some one would find out about that money, though I don't know how on earth they could have."

"I think I know who did," commented Dannigan from where he was kneeling back of Quinn's chair. "These knots tell quite a story, all right. I think, in fact, that they tell everything."

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Quinn had expected Dannigan to examine the knots carefully, but of course he could not be certain what the conclusions would be. He therefore wondered just what Dannigan meant by his speech and waited patiently for the explanation.

"Maybe they are in the house yet; hadn't we better search?" Ellis looked at Quinn. Dannigan also looked at Quinn, who shook his head.

"Have they gone?" Ellis demanded. Quinn nodded.

"Don't worry, Mr. Ellis," observed Dannigan. "We will land your man without doing much searching for him."

Quinn did not just like that speech and was sorry that Dannigan was behind him where he could not see how he looked when he said that. Dannigan was untying Quinn.

"Now tell us about it. How many were there? How long have they been gone? Which way did they go?" These questions were very reassuring.

"Hi—Hi don't know for sure, sir," began Quinn. "You see, sor, Hi were hupstairs when Hi heard a noise-like down 'ere. Hi thought maybe hit were burglars, as you might say, and Hi takes my pistol, sir, and comes a-slippin' down the stairs.

"Hi didn't get no ways, sir, for here Hi saw that window open; and as Hi stood a-lookin' to see why, Hi felt a sort of whizz and something cracked me on the head, sir—something terrible. Hi guess hit knocked me unconscious, for when Hi knew anything at all, sir, Hi were being tied up in this chair 'ere.

"Hi struggled all Hi could, and Hi might 'ave got away, sir; only Hi was that weak from my head that Hi kept a-gettin' dizzy-like and he didn't seem to 'ave much trouble tyin' me."

He rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Hi'm sorry, sir, that Hi didn't watch better; and Hi 'ope there's nothin' much missin', sir?"

He looked inquiringly at Ellis.

"Only a matter of ten thousand or so," Ellis groaned. "But I guess you did your best, Quinn."

"Yes, sir," replied Quinn, and he straightway staggered as if about to fall. Ellis caught him and let him down into a chair. Quinn put his hand to his head and brought it away smeared with blood. Ellis gasped.

"Good Lord, Quinn! You are near killed!" In a moment he was bathing the head while the smell of brandy drifted through the room.

Dannigan had 'phoned to the station and was now examining the room. Quinn felt much better, though he did not say so. That lump on his head was now as robust a bump as he could possibly have desired.

"The safe is not injured in any way," Dannigan commented. "Whoever opened it used the combination, didn't they, Quinn?" He looked suddenly at that individual.

"Hi think so, sir."

"Did you open it?" asked Dannigan sharply.

"No, sir."

"Do you know the combination?"

"No, sir."

"Humph!"

Quinn wondered just what that "humph" might mean, and watched Dannigan as well as he could as the Sergeant examined the footprints and the window sash.

"HEY! What's this!" and Dannigan picked up a villainous-looking cane from the floor by the stairs.

"Is this what he hit you with?"

He presented it to Quinn. That individual, however, was not to be tricked into any inconsistency.

"Hi'm sure Hi don't know, sir. Hi 'ad no chance to see what 'it me."

"You just felt it, eh?" Dannigan grinned at him with twinkling eyes.

"Yes, sir," said Quinn, solemnly. Dannigan resumed his search.

"Well, well. This door looks like a bullet went through it. How about it?"

"When Hi was 'it," Quinn volunteered, "Hi 'ad my pistol in my 'and; and hit seemed like hit went off, sir."

"Here is the gun," and Dannigan picked it up from among the pillows on the couch. "Yes, there is one load missing."

He twirled the cylinder thoughtfully.

"Do you think you hit him?"

"Hi don't rightly know, sir."

"I guess you did, all right." Dannigan was examining the floor. "There are several drops of fresh blood here."

Quinn started to speak, but stopped. He was trying to remember if he had been near the library door after cutting his finger. He couldn't remember being. Had it been possible that he had done things while only semi-conscious? That he had unknowingly

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left clues that would lead to his undoing?

Dannigan was continuing.

"You must have shot his hand, for that would account for the blood on the knots you were tied with."

Quinn nodded approvingly. That was a thing he had thought of when he tied them.

"Funny, though, there is not a bit of blood about the safe."

Quinn had not thought of that.

"But there is over here." Dannigan was now examining the floor near the front hall. "Yep, there is no doubt of it. Here, and here——"

He was down on hands and knees, and did not observe Quinn, who was staring blankly at him. He could have sworn that he had not been near the front hall after he had cut his finger; yet how else could fresh blood be there?

Where had he gone while semi-conscious? What clues had he left? Quinn was very much worried indeed. He had thought he could disprove that reputed law regarding criminals and their clues, and now——

The police surgeon arrived and proceeded carefully to examine Quinn's head, so that he got no chance to follow further the investigations of Sergeant Dannigan.

When the examination was over and the head duly and sufficiently bandaged, Dannigan rejoined them, reporting that he was fully satisfied with what he had found.

"I know the man who did it," he announced with a confidence that had different effects upon his small audience. Mr Ellis looked his surprise and admiration. Quinn, finding the Sergeant's eyes fixed upon him, tried to look only mildly interested.

"There is only one crook in the profession who is known to tie knots like this," and he held up one he had cut away. "That crook is known as 'Chigger, the Yegg'—one of the meanest little scamps in the business to lay hand on."

This announcement did not mean much to Ellis. It did to Quinn. He had expected it. A short time before this a Sunday paper had had an illustrated feature article on the ways of "Chigger, the Yegg." Dannigan had probably studied it. So had Quinn. The knots agreed perfectly with the description.

"Now," continued Dannigan, "this safe would be a snap for 'Chigger' to open. This whole job was done slowly and with deliberation. Again that is like 'Chigger,' for he was never known to hurry." Dannigan looked at Quinn as if seeking for corroboration. Quinn nodded in agreement before he could check himself.

"Then again," the Sergeant went on, "'Chigger' never bothers about covering up clues. He just lets them stand for what they are worth."

Again he glanced to Quinn as if for approval, but the butler only looked at him inquiringly.

"That is evidently what some one has done here." No one else spoke, so Dannigan continued.

"Now these methods are so well known that it does not look like 'Chigger' himself would take such pains to leave his trademark on a job like this, does it?"

Quinn again felt that the Sergeant was looking at him for a reply, but he said nothing.

"I would say—" Dannigan spoke meditatively—"that this job was not done by 'Chigger,' but by some one who was trying to put the blame on 'Chigger.'"

He paused a moment. Quinn was sure the Sergeant was looking at him, and could feel himself getting cold all over. He was afraid his face was showing more emotion than was safe. He did not know how difficult it was to read any expression upon a face as bandaged as his was.

"The one thing against that theory," resumed Dannigan in his exasperatingly deliberate manner, "is the fact that I saw 'Chigger' himself in this block yesterday."

Quinn nearly jumped out of his bandage.

"Do you suppose we will ever catch him?" asked Ellis anxiously.

"Sure. He is probably pinched by now. 'Chigger' did not know that he was seen, of course; but I knew trouble was brewing for this neighborhood, so just as soon as Central called us I immediately notified the whole force to watch for him. That 'phone call evidently came while he was tying Quinn here, so he has had practically no chance to get away. Besides, he is such a deliberate scoundrel he always takes plenty of time for everything."

Dannigan had the air of one who has done his work well, and knows it.

Quinn did not even allow himself an audible sigh of relief, but there came to his eye just the least glimmer of a twinkle. Even though he had slugged himself too hard, his plan had succeeded.

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IT WAS late that afternoon when he heard Mr. Ellis talking to the Police Station, and heard those worthies admit that they had not landed "Chigger."

It was still later before he had a perfectly safe (and he would take no other) chance to slip into the library for his little package of "swag." Carefully he pulled out the book, removed the package and replaced all as it was before.

Up in his room the package seemed astonishingly light and thin, and he looked inside. Only a folded paper met his eye. He pulled it out. On it he read:

PARD:

Thanks for opening the window for me. I came through while you were after the boots. Thanks also for putting the swag where I could get it so easy. Thought I would leave you half, but got so interested in watching your very remarkable antics that I got in the way of that stray bullet, which pinked me a little. Just for that I am taking it all. It does seem a shame after all your hard work. Better luck next time.

CHIGGER.

Quinn sighed as he looked about for a safe way of destroying this loving epistle, and shook his head resignedly as he resumed the regular routine of the butler's life.

The Ivory Dome

A Tale of the Big-Leaguers *En Route*

by Bozeman Bulger

SLIM GRIFFIN, outfielder, landed in the training-camp of the Champion Grays as green as the necktie that his sweetheart, on the eve of departure, had tied around his neck. They matched perfectly. In the old home town of Newsite this color scheme may have gone unnoticed; but not so with the diamond doings of Slim. Down there Two-bagger was his middle name. You may not find Newsite on the map, by the way, but Arthur Smith, big-league scout and explorer of strange burgs for the Grays, located it on the lower end of the Brazos River, Texas.

On a memorable afternoon—memorable in Newsite—Scout Smith climbed out of a high-topped buggy at the ball grounds just in time to see our hero clean the bases with a home-run drive and pick up $6.40 in dimes, tossed from the little grandstand that, in size and contour, looked like an upright piano. Considering this a fair start, the

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scout waited around until the sorrel-topped, lanky-legged outfielder had repeated the dose in a later inning and had thrown in a pair of two-baggers for good measure.

That was enough for Arthur. When a ball player can clean the bases on four separate and critical occasions in one afternoon, right then and there the seasoned scout figures it sufficient grounds for taking a chance. Arthur didn't take time to figure on the weight of Slim's feet, nor did he inquire into the caliber of his brain cells; but simply got his name to a contract, told him to report at Marlowe, also in the State of Texas, for spring practise and lit out for newer and unplowed fields. That is the way of the scout.

Thus it is that we have the champion hitter of the Newsite Browns wearing the big-league uniform of the Grays and taking his meals in courses at the Arlington Hotel. The meals are mentioned advisedly, for they made a far deeper impression on Slim than did the idea of wearing a violet-striped baseball suit and being called a Champ. The gaunt hero of Newsite tried hard to restrain his open admiration for the food feature of training, but he couldn't. On the third day of his emancipation from home cooking—which naturally, would be the third day of his privilege to go as far as he liked on the Arlington menu—Slim "tipped his mit," making it perfectly plain just where his interest in fast company centered. He had been assigned to a table with Larry Hennessey, star infielder of the regular team and, next to Manager Jack McGill, the leading practical joker of the club. But Larry was a kindly soul at that, and gave his new-found country friend much real, fatherly advice.

"Do they eat this way in the big league all the time?" Slim inquired of Larry one morning, as his waiter, heavily laden, staggered to a serving-table and lowered the tray with a groan.

"Do they?" and Larry's eyes twinkled as he watched the waiter work. "You just wait till we get to San Antonio and we'll show you some regular eating."

"Gee!" exclaimed Slim as he backed off to give the waiter room. "I certainly hope I make good!"

Though the Grays had trained in Texas for several years, the jokesmiths of the club had not found a recruit quite so ignorant of the ways of the world as Slim Griffin. From the day that Larry Hennessey passed the word around the Newsite hero's life in camp could not be likened to a bed of roses. College hazing is a gentle art as compared to the gantlet a raw recruit has to run upon his first appearance in fast company.

It may have been Slim Griffin's aptitude for the big-league food or it may have been his inability to hit a curve ball, but it soon became evident that his chances of making the team were just about on a par with his first name. The players insist to this day, however, that Slim really ate himself out of the league.

"You know, I'm kinder fond of this big Rube," Manager McGill said to Eddie Shay, the old coach, as they strolled out to the park on the fifth morning for practice. "But I'm afraid he'll never be able to deliver in fast company. He's too slow."

"Yes," agreed old Eddie, "and a terrible fish on a curve ball. Give him a straight one over the middle and he'll knock it a mile; but once they begin to mix 'em up on him—good night!"

"That's the dope, I guess," said McGill. "Scout Smith must have seen him hitting at straight ones in the groove."

"He might get over it, at that—"Eddie always tried to save a player if he could—"if only he wasn't so green! They should have named him Ivory Dome. He is solid bone from the shoulders up."

"Worst Rube I ever saw," agreed McGill. "He tells me he has never been one hundred miles from his little home town out here in Texas, and that he has never ridden on a sleeping-car in his life."

"Going to let him go to San Antonio?"

"Might just as well," McGill decided. "I've got to release him sooner or later, but I hate to send him back without giving him a chance to see a regular exhibition game or ride in a sleeper. The trip would give him something to talk about when he got back home, anyway."

These two old hadjis of the game found Slim at the park joking with the players as they took turn at bat, and between times, on the bench, telling them in his quaint drawl of the way things were done in the home town. No one could help liking the big Rube. His mere innocence appealed.

"Say, Eddie," McGill cautioned, as the two walked on the practise field. "Don't say anything to the youngster about his chances until after he has played at San

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Antonio. I want to try him out once, anyway, and there is no use in making him unhappy until after he has had his trip."

It's pretty hard to fool a seasoned ball player, and the Gray regulars knew as well as McGill that Griffin wouldn't do; but they were hoping that the release would be postponed as long as possible. They not only liked Slim, but he had afforded them any amount of amusement by being the butt of all the old practical jokes that had come to be traditions of the Grays. News, therefore, that he was to go on the first trip —though as yet he didn't know it—was received with great joy.

"I guess we'll have to give the old boy the third degree on the sleeper tonight," remarked Larry Hennessey as the gang started on the jog back to the hotel.

"What do you mean?" asked Jerry Bates, crack outfielder. "The red lantern?"

"Sure," and Larry laughed. "And, so long as we are at it we might as well hand him the old grip gag. Worked mighty well on that young fellow from Keokuk last Spring."

"Do you think he'll stand for them both without getting wise?"

"It's a cinch," Larry decided. "He'll stand for anything and be good-natured about it, too."

When the regulars trooped into the clubhouse—really a bath house—Slim and the other recruits were on the lounges cooling off and waiting to be rubbed. Griffin noticed the veterans crowding into a corner of the room scanning a sheet of paper that the trainer had hung up on the wall.

"What are they looking at?" he asked of the recruit on the lounge next to him.

"Names of the men who are to go to San Antonio, I reckon," his friend replied.

During the training-season it is customary for the big-league teams to play exhibition games with the minor-league clubs in the nearby cities once a week. These breaks in the monotony of training are looked forward to with great joy by the regulars as well as the recruits. Half of the team is left behind, however, and there is always much speculation as to what players the manager will select for the day's excursion.

The recruits have an added interest in that it gives them a chance to show the manager what they can do in a real game. Again, they like to play purely for the sake of playing.

MANAGER McGILL never notified the players personally of his selections for these weekly trips, but it was his custom to make up the list in his room and give it to the trainer to post in the bath house.

"Guess I'll take a look at that, myself," declared Slim, as he watched the scene in the corner with interest.

"Your name is here, Slim," cried Larry Hennessey, as the Newsite hero threw a bath towel around him and strode over to the group.

"Mighty glad to hear that," he remarked; but Slim wouldn't be sure it wasn't a joke until he peered over the shoulders of the others and saw written on the sheet "Griffin, center field."

"What do I take with me?" he inquired of Larry.

"Road uniform, celluloid collar and a bottle of hair oil. That's all."

"I've got them things, all right," said Slim; and Larry nodded. He had secretly inspected Griffin's wardrobe.

"The train leaves at midnight," announced Henry, the colored trainer. "But the sleeper is on the side track down at the station and you can get on it and go to bed as early as you like. Here's an upper for you, Mr. Griffin."

Slim took the little yellow slip and examined it curiously. "What do you mean by 'upper'?" he asked innocently.

"Oh," answered Larry Hennessey, "that means that you can sleep up above the other boys and won't be bothered by people hitting your feet coming through the car. You are also near the light, which will give you practise for playing the sunfield."

When Slim Griffin reached the sleeping-car, which lay on a side track down near the Marlowe freight depot, the jokers already had set the stage. Those who had done this thing for years were all in their places. Even the ones who had not been forewarned were familiar enough with the proceedings not to show surprise at anything they heard. The gang was seated in the smoking compartment listening to Jerry Bates as he read aloud from a newspaper when Slim, in search of Larry Hennessey, pushed aside the curtains and stuck in his head.

"Say, Larry," asked Slim, as he detected his friend over in the corner seat, apparently deeply interested. "Will you show

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me where I sleep and how to get in the plegtakèd thing?"

Bates stopped reading during the laugh that followed. But Larry didn't smile. In the kindest manner possible he arose and went with the recruit.

"Let me see your ticket," he said to Slim. Upon examination he found that the Rube outfielder was assigned to Upper Ten. As ball clubs always travel in a private sleeper —that is, big-league clubs—the players never wait for the porter or conductor to find their berths.

"Here you are," said Larry, when he had located the berth. "You're just above me."

"How do I git up there?" inquired Slim. He peered through the heavy green curtains and inspected with interest what he called "the little cubby hole."

"They will give you a ladder," his friend replied.

"Say, Larry," he asked again. "What is this little hammock for?"

"Oh, I guess they made a mistake," the veteran explained. "Those are only for the pitchers."

"The pitchers?"

"Yes. You see, they always sleep with their arms in these hammocks as as not to get a sore shoulder." Slim's brow wrinkled. He was thinking this over gravely.

"Well, this one is made up for a left-hander," he finally deduced.

"Sure," agreed Larry. "They arrange them that way. The right-handers sleep on the other side of the car."

Slim began dumping his coat and things into the berth, and from the distance he and Larry could hear Jerry Bates still reading aloud. Slim caught part of a sentence that appeared to interest him greatly and he stopped to listen.

"The Governor fears that if Carter is not apprehended within the next few days," Jerry was reading, "he is likely to be holding up passenger trains single-handed along the roads leading to San Antonio."

As Jerry finished the sentence Griffin's ears pricked up. "Are they talking about Jeff Carter, the outlaw?" he asked.

"That's the fellow, all right," answered Larry. "And he's liable to cut loose in this part of the State at any time, they tell me." Jerry in the meantime went on reading:

"The whole upper end of Texas is in a state of terror, and it will be that way in the lower end pretty soon unless the Governor starts the Rangers on the trail or calls out the militia."

"I want to hear that," Slim said; and, with Larry covering his lips to keep from laughing, they went to the smoking-compartment. The "plant" was working beautifully.

The jokers didn't know, however, that they had picked out a name that was a real terror in Texas. Slim Griffin had heard much of this outlaw and was eager to hear more. Hanging over the wash stand, he listened attentively until Jerry had finished the article, most of which was made up as he went. For fully an hour then the players discussed the terrible doings of outlaws in general and the many dangers to which travelers were exposed. Some of them had imaginations that would have made a fiction writer jealous, but what made the "plant" better was that Carter was really operating in Texas about that time. This gang of jokers had frightened young players before, but they never had found the stage so naturally set.

Manager McGill finally came in, saw the trend of things, and without batting an eye proceeded to tell the players about a posse he had seen going out in search of Jeff Carter. They were figuring, he said, on getting a big reward. And, though he didn't know it, Jack McGill was telling the truth.

"Oh, well," finally announced Jerry Bates, "there is nothing to worry about while we are going over. We won't have any money aboard till we start back." He turned as the secretary of the club came in. "Will we, Sam?"

"No," and Sam Arnold smiled. "The bag here is empty now." He also knew it would be empty coming back. Since baseball has grown to be a big business, visiting clubs are paid their share of the receipts in checks. Slim Griffin didn't know this, though, and greedily ate up all details of the danger.

"That lets us out for tonight, all right," said Larry Hennessey, as he arose. "But who's going to hold the lantern?"

"The what?" asked Slim.

"The red lantern, of course. Somebody always has to sit on the back platform with a red lantern so as to keep other trains from running into us."

"Now don't think you are going to shove that job off on one of these young fellows without giving them a chance," spoke up

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the secretary. "You'll all draw for it, that's what you'll do."

Sam Arnold thereupon tore up a sheet of writing-paper into small bits and wrote a name on each of the tiny slips. These he placed in a hat to be shaken up, after which the manager would draw one out. The player whose name appeared on the drawn slip, they explained to Slim, would have to sit up and stand guard with the red lantern.

McGill was called after the slips had been well shaken and drew one out.

"Griffin!" he announced, showing the bit of paper to Slim. If he had shown the other slips our Newsite hero would have found the name "Griffin" on every one of them, but the secretary had already tossed the remaining ones out of the window.

"All right," said Slim bravely; and when the train started he armed himself with a red lantern and took his place on the rear platform. Huddled up on a little stool Slim remained there until a brakeman, who was also in the joke plot, found him asleep at two o'clock and offered to sit out the rest of the night for him.

GRIFFIN crawled into his berth feeling that he had done the club a great service. Only one train came within one hundred feet of him and that stopped before he had even a chance to wave his lantern! This loyalty, he figured, ought to make him strong with the manager in getting a permanent job in the outfield. But in his sleep he dreamed of Jeff Carter, the outlaw.

From the outlaw Slim's mind drifted to the game he was to play in the next day. He dreamed that he had made two home runs and a whole lot of two-baggers. During his waking moments Slim noticed that his bed was decidedly uncomfortable; but since he thought that customary in sleeping-cars, it was the next morning before he discovered that his berth was littered with peanut shells. The jokers had added these to Slim's general discomfort during the night, though Larry Hennessey swore to him that they must have been dropped by hoboes who were riding on the roof.

The game was played at San Antonio before a big crowd, but Slim did not get his home runs and two-baggers. He was credited with one single, by the grace of the official scorer, but that was the last base he ever reached for the Grays. The opposing pitcher made a quick throw to first and the awkward countryman was caught napping ten feet from the bag.

Manager McGill let loose something that sounded suspiciously like a smothered oath and disgustedly threw his cap into the dust in front of the bench.

"That'll be about all for him," he said to Eddie Shay. "As you go out tell Sam Arnold to get me a release blank, will you?"

"Yes, I guess he's done," the old coach agreed. "Still, Mac, old leaguers sometimes get caught off the bag."

"Oh, I'm not turning him loose for that. Of course they do; but this fellow hasn't any speed at all and is shy in the bean. You had it right when you said his head made you think of an ivory billiard ball."

"Going to leave him flat in San Antonio?" inquired the naturally sympathetic Eddie.

"He would have a tough time of it, wouldn't he?" meditated the manager. "Say, Eddie," he said, turning around abruptly and changing his mind. "Don't say anything to him yet. I'll see if I can't place him in some bush league. Tell Sam to buy a ticket for him and we'll take him back with us tonight, anyway."

Slim Griffin knew that he had made a bad impression in his first game, but he still had hopes. He explained to Larry Hennessey, his confidant, that his ankle was stiff and that had slowed him up. Larry considerately made no inquiries as to what Slim's trouble was inside the head. And probably Slim wouldn't have understood if he had.

The fact that the big leaguers won the game made it a little easier for Slim and the other erring recruits. At least it kept him with the club for another day, and it was a jolly party that crowded into the private sleeper for the trip back to the training-quarters, where they were due to arrive at nine o'clock the next morning. Slim joined in the songs that were sung in the smoker, but he wasn't exactly at ease. From his coat pocket a folded newspaper protruded and on the edge could be seen a headline that contained the name of Jeff Carter.

"Pretty good crowd, fellows," announced the secretary as he pushed his way in and dropped his leather handbag on the floor. Slim eyed this bag with apprehension and wondered at the careless manner in which it was kicked about the room. He did not know that Sam had received a check for his

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share of the receipts and that it had already been mailed to New York.

"By the way, fellows," Sam suddenly remembered. Let me give give you breakfast money." Reaching in the bag, he picked up a handful of small bills and, according to baseball custom, handed each player a dollar for the meal which was to be had at a lunch station down the line. What was left Sam put back into the bag in a way to let the green hands think it was full.

Though he had made a bad impression in the game, Slim made up his mind right then and there to guard that precious bag.

The last man to arrive was Manager McGill. He was in unusually good spirits after the victory. Whether the Grays played against a college nine or for the world's championship McGill liked to win. He was a hard loser. No player who knew him ever thought of asking for a loan of ten dollars after a defeat. He would advance them anything they wanted when the club won.

"Everybody here?" he asked of the colored trainer, who had been checking up.

"Yes, sir," he reported. "You were the last."

"Boys," announced McGill, "I want you all to get to bed early tonight. You can play cards until ten o'clock, but everybody must be in their berths by ten thirty. You know we have practise in the morning as soon as we arrive."

"Say, Mac," called out Larry Hennessey as the manager was making for his drawing room. "Who's going to guard the grips?"

"The what—" the manager started to say, and then smiled. "That's right, too," he added with a half grin; and several of the players looked out the window to repress their mirth at the prospect of another time-honored baseball joke. They had almost forgotten the wonderful "plant" laid for it on the way over.

"Will we draw for it?" asked Larry.

"Oh, I don't know," said McGill, who could feed a joke better than any of his players. "Maybe somebody will volunteer. Would be a tough thing if some of our stuff was stolen."

For a moment there was dead silence. Two of the recruits were on the point of lifting their hands, but with a side glance McGill restrained them. All hands waited expectantly. Slim Griffin could feel that all eyes were on him. He hesitated for a brief moment only.

"I'll volunteer, Mr. McGill," he finally blurted out.

"Well, I'll say one thing for you," observed the manager. "You did a good job with the red lantern, coming over. Seems to me you'd be just the right man. What do you say, boys?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" they cried in chorus. "Just the man."

The card games on this night were stopped earlier than usual. There could be no such fun in a game of poker as peeking through the slits in the sleeper curtains at Slim Griffin seated on a campstool, armed with a bat, guarding the wardrobe.

Through the long night the recruit sat there doing what he thought a great service to his team. From the berths he could hear a snicker now and then, but it never occurred to Slim that he could be the object of mirth. Occasionally the porter, conductor or brakeman would come through the car and bow to Slim with great deference. They were also in with the joke. The porter, in particular, had assisted ball clubs in working this stunt.

But even a good joke can lose its punch in time, and one by one the athletes dropped off into sound slumber. The steady beat of the snores and the heavy breathing of those near Slim soon had its effect. The unconscious suggestion of sleep was too much for a tired country boy, and he found himself fighting to keep awake. In fitful dreams his mind wandered into all the robberies that he had ever read of; but, strange to say, when he awoke he couldn't remember of ever having read of anybody overpowering the night guard of a Pullman sleeper.

It must have been two o'clock in the morning when Slim was suddenly aroused from a cat nap by the sensation of a strange person being in the car. He heard a slight sound down the dimly lighted aisle and for a moment was afraid to open his eyes. Despite the presence of twenty strong-muscled and big-boned men around him, the innocent recruit was beset with a feeling of terrible loneliness. Gradually, though, the lids of his eyes parted and Slim sat up with a start. Through the gloom he could make out the stooping figure of a man fifteen feet away.

A panicky feeling seized the recruit for a second, but remembering the brave deeds of his forbears, who had fought as pioneers along the Brazos, he shook this off and determined to act. He now saw that the man

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wore the blue uniform of a railroad employé. The brass buttons on the coat were conspicuous even in the dim light. Slim remained perfectly quiet and looked closer. The intruder was stooping in front of the berth occupied by Sam Arnold, the secretary! Suddenly Slim remembered that the precious leather bag had been shoved underneath.

With a bound the raw-boned countryman made a leap for the uniformed man, who arose and stepped back just in time to keep from falling.

"What are you——"

The words choked up in the recruit's throat and died in a gurgle. The intruder had whipped a long, blue-steeled revolver from a holster that hung from the shoulder and beneath his coat. In his excitement Slim had dropped the bat that had lain across his knees all night, but the fighting blood of the Texan surged in him. With a sweep of his long, sinewy arm he brushed the weapon aside as it went off with a loud report, the bullet shattering a mirror in the end of the car. Having no weapon, Slim remembered a fighting-trick of his boyhood and with all the strength in his body hurled himself at the man, head first. The top of his bullet-like head struck the intruder just above the ear with a sound like a wooden maul striking a tent peg. Down he went. Again and again the infuriated recruit butted the marauder until he lay on the floor unconscious. Blood streamed from his mouth, ears and nose.

In a moment the car was in turmoil. The suddenly aroused athletes were climbing from their berths, unable for a moment to ascertain what had happened. Larry Hennessey and Manager McGill got to the side of Slim just in time to prevent a homicide. He had snatched the little ladder that hung from one of the upper berths and was about to beat the unconscious man across the head. The fallen man's features were almost unrecognizable.

"Hey, you big boobs!" shouted Manager McGill. "What are you doing? Trying to commit murder?"

By this time other players had climbed into the aisle and assisted in pulling Slim away.

"A fine joke you fellows have played!" snapped the manager at Larry Hennessey. "This is a fine mess for a big-league ball club to be mixed up in! Get this fellow into the light!"

The porter and conductor, hearing the noise, had come on the run and the former quickly turned up the lights.

"My Heavens!" exclaimed Eddie Shay, the coach. "He has killed the brakeman!"

"He was robbing the berths!" screamed Slim Griffin, who was being held at the other end of the car. "He was after Sam's leather bag."

The conductor ordered everybody to stand back and stooped down to examine the fallen man.

"Get some water and wash his face," he called to the porter. "I can't tell who it is."

"Well, it ain't the brakeman, that's a cinch," cried out one of the players. "Here he comes from the other car now."

In the meantime the train had pulled up at a small station. Fortunately the ball-club sleeper was on the rear, and the other passengers were sleeping soundly, in peaceful ignorance of what was going on behind them.

"This fellow is certainly a stranger to me," announced the Pullman conductor as he finally got the unconscious man's face washed. "Say, porter," he called out. "Go over to the station there and tell the agent to call up the Coroner and the Sheriff!

"And, you," he said to the brakeman, who was still rubbing his eyes after the sudden awakening, "notify the train conductor that this car will have to be held until the authorities get here!"

Manager McGill called the colored trainer, and an effort was made to resuscitate the badly bruised and unconscious man by the use of ammonia. This proved futile, however, and the unfortunate victim continued to bleed from the ears. Slim's hard head had struck him a terrible blow.

The ball players, clad in their night clothes, were still gathered in knots and talking excitedly of the unfortunate finish to their practical joke when the Sheriff arrived, accompanied by a deputy and the Coroner.

SHERIFF PRATHER was a perfect type of the fighting Texan. For years before his election he had served as a member of the Rangers, one of the bravest bodies of men in the world. He had hunted outlaws while in his teens, and practically every hold-up man and cattle thief in Texas was known to him by sight. As he came down to the car Prather wore

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the ever present dove-colored sombrero, and from a shoulder holster swung a six-shooter that had seen service. Without hesitation he pushed his brawny shoulders through the open door of the car and, ignoring the athletes, who looked at him curiously, strode to the fallen man.

"Who did this?" he demanded of the crowd. Manager McGill stepped forward.

"One of my players, Sheriff," he answered.

"Players?" repeated the Sheriff in surprise, "Oh, is this the ball club?"

"Yes," replied McGill. "And I am the manager."

"Well, see that nobody leaves the car," said the Sheriff to McGill, and then motioned to his deputy, who walked to the door and stood on guard.

Sheriff Prather stooped down, put his arms around the chest of the fallen man and dragged him into the smoking-compartment, where he could lay him out and get a better look at his face.

"He's not dead," he said, after listening to the heartbeats. "But you had better send for a doctor."

Though it was done so deftly the players did not notice it, the Sheriff quietly pulled the man's hands beneath his body and slipped a pair of handcuffs around his wrists. He was taking no chances.

"Did you say one of your men did this?" he asked of Manager McGill, who stood in the doorway.

"Yes—that is——"

I guess we fellows are to blame, though," interrupted Larry Hennessey, who was game enough to take his share of the responsibility. "It was a joke we put up on a recruit."

"What were you going to say?" the sheriff asked of McGill, ignoring Larry's remark.

"I was going to say," answered the manager, "that the boy who did this was a member of the team—that is, I released him last night. But he does not know it yet. He was to be notified tomorrow."

"There ain't no use in tryin' to protect me," suddenly cried out Slim Griffin, who was still being held by his team mates. "I done it, and I done it because he pulled a gun on me. Down in the Brazos, Sheriff, as you know, we don't allow no man to do that unless he wants trouble."

"That's all right," responded Sheriff Prather soothingly. "There is plenty of time to fix up a defense. What we want is to keep this fellow from dying."

The doctor arrived while the players were still crowding around the Sheriff and trying to explain that they were to blame. It took him but a short time to see that the fellow would live.

"What is this?" the doctor inquired. He had discovered the handcuffs, while trying to feel the man's pulse. The Sheriff grinned knowingly.

"You say this man here—" pointing to Griffin—"has been released?" he asked of McGill.

"The papers were made out in San Antonio yesterday," he answered. "But that doesn't necessarily go. My club will take the responsibility. I was in the joking plot as much as any of them."

"Well, I guess he'll manage to get along," observed the officer. "This young fellow has captured Jeff Carter!"

The doctor looked up in astonishment.

"And there's a standing reward," went on the Sheriff, "of ten thousand dollars for his body, dead or alive. See this gun?"

He exhibited a long, blue-steel-barreled revolver.

"That gun has killed more than twenty men. Right smart comedown, though, for Jeff Carter to be dressing up like a trainman and tryin' to rob a ball club."

"Why, there wasn't ten dollars in that bag altogether," spoke up Sam Arnold. "We are always paid in checks."

"What!" Slim Griffin, as he uttered the word, glared at the players around him as if he had just as soon start butting again.

"Mr. McGill," he said, "that's all right about that release. I reckon I don't belong in the big league."

"When I get this reward," the Sheriff asked, as he turned to leave with his prisoner, "where shall I send it?"

"To Newsite, Texas, care of the Browns," promptly answered the recruit; and nobody offered objections.

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The Laughing Cavalier

by Baroness Orczy

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

DOES this narrative need an apology?

If so it must also come from those members of the Blakeney family in whose veins runs the blood of that Sir Percy Blakeney who is known to history as the Scarlet Pimpernel, for they in a manner are responsible for the telling of this veracious chronicle.

For the past eight years now—ever since the true story of the Scarlet Pimpernel was put on record by the present author—these gentle, kind, inquisitive friends have asked me to trace their descent back to an ancestor more remote than was Sir Percy, to one in fact who by his life and by his deeds stands forth from out the distant past as a conclusive proof that the laws which govern the principles of heredity are as unalterable as those that rule the destinies of the universe. They have pointed out to me that since Sir Percy Blakeney's was an exceptional personality, possessing exceptional characteristics which his friends pronounced sublime and his detractors arrogant, he must have had an ancestor in the dim long ago who was, like him, exceptional, like him possessed of qualities which call forth the devotion of friends and the rancor of enemies. Nay, more; there must have existed at one time or another a man who possessed that same sunny disposition, that same irresistible laughter, that same careless *insouciance* and adventurous spirit which were subsequently transmitted to his descendants, of whom the Scarlet Pimpernel himself was the most distinguished individual.

All these were unanswerable arguments, and with the request that accompanied them I had long intended to comply. Time has been my only enemy in thwarting my intentions until now—time and the multiplicity of material and documents to be gone through ere vague knowledge could be turned into certitude.

Now at last I am in a position to present not only to the Blakeneys themselves but to all those who look on the Scarlet Pimpernel as their hero and their friend, the true history of one of his most noted forebears.

Strangely enough, his history has never been written before. And yet countless millions must, during the past three centuries, have stood before his picture. We of the present generation, who are the proud possessors of that picture now, have looked on him many a time, always with sheer, pure joy in our hearts, our lips smiling, our eyes sparkling in response to his; almost forgetting the genius of the artist who portrayed him in the very realism of the personality which literally seems to breathe and palpitate and certainly to laugh to us out of the canvas.

Those twinkling eyes! How well we know them! That laugh! We can almost hear it. As for the swagger, the devil-may-care arrogance, do we not condone it, seeing that it has its mainspring behind a fine, straight brow whose noble, sweeping lines betray an undercurrent of dignity and of thought.

And yet no biographer has—so far as is known to the author of this veracious chronicle—ever attempted to tell us anything of this man's life. No one has attempted hitherto to lift the veil of anonymity which only thinly hides the identity of the Laughing Cavalier.

But here in Haarlem, in the sleepy, yet thriving little Dutch town where he lived, the hard-frozen ground in Winter seems at times to send forth a memory-echo of his firm footstep, of the jingling of his spurs and the clang of his sword; and the old gate on the Spaarne through which he passed so often is still haunted with the sound of his merry

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laughter, while his pleasant voice seems still to rouse the ancient walls from their sleep.

The story which I now present goes to prove what I myself had known long ago: namely, that the Laughing Cavalier who sat to Frans Hals for his portrait in 1624 was the direct ancestor of Sir Percy Blakeney, known to history as the Scarlet Pimpernel.

Haarlem, 1913. EMMUSKA ORCZY

PROLOGUE

HAARLEM, MARCH 29TH, 1623

THE day had been Spring-like, even hot; a very unusual occurrence in Holland at this time of year. Gilda Beresteyn had retired early to her room. She had dismissed Maria, her old duenna, whose chatterings grated upon her nerves, with the promise that she would call her later. Maria had arranged a tray of dainties on the table, a jug of milk, some fresh white bread and a little roast meat on a plate, for Gilda had eaten very little supper and it might happen that she would feel hungry later on.

It would have been useless to argue with the old woman about this matter. She considered Gilda's health to be under her own special charge, ever since good Madame Beresteyn had placed her baby girl in Maria's strong, devoted arms ere she closed her eyes in the last long sleep.

Gilda Beresteyn, glad to be alone, threw open the casement of the window and peered out into the night.

The shadow of the terrible tragedy—the concluding acts of which were being enacted day by day in the Gevangen Poort of 'S Gravenhage—had touched even the distant city of Haarlem with its gloom. The eldest son of John of Barneveld was awaiting final trial and inevitable condemnation; his brother Stoutenburg was a fugitive; and their accomplices, Korenwinder, van Dyk, the redoubtable Slatius and others, were giving away under torture the details of the aborted conspiracy against the life of Maurice of Nassau, Stadtholder of Holland, Gelderland, Utrecht and Overyssel, Captain and Admiral-General of the State, Prince of Orange and virtual ruler of Protestant and republican Netherlands.

Traitors all of them, would-be assassins, the Stadtholder whom they had planned to murder was showing them no mercy. As he had sent John of Barneveld to the scaffold to assuage his own thirst for supreme power and satisfy his own ambitions, so he was ready to send John of Barneveld's sons to death and John of Barneveld's widow to sorrow and loneliness.

The sons of John of Barneveld had planned to avenge their father's death by the committal of a cruel and dastardly murder. Fate and the treachery of mercenary accomplices had intervened, and now Gweneveld was on the eve of condemnation and Stoutenburg was a wanderer on the face of the earth with a price put upon his head.

Gilda Beresteyn could not endure the thought of it all. All the memories of her childhood were linked with the Barnevelds. Stoutenburg had been her brother Nicolaes's most intimate friend, and had been the first man to whisper words of love in Gilda's ears, ere his boundless ambition and his unscrupulous egoism drove him into another, more profitable, marriage.

Gilda's face flamed up with shame even now at recollection of his treachery, and at the deep humiliation which she had felt when she saw the first budding blossom of her girlish love so carelessly tossed aside by the man whom she had trusted.

A sense of oppression weighed her spirits down tonight. It almost seemed as if the tragedy which had encompassed the entire Barneveld family was even now hovering over the peaceful house of Mynheer Beresteyn, deputy burgomaster and chief civic magistrate of the town of Haarlem. The air itself felt heavy as if with the weight of impending doom.

The little city lay quiet and at peace; a soft breeze from the south lightly fanned the girl's cheeks. She leaned her elbows on the window sill and rested her chin in her hands. The moon was not up and yet it was not dark; a mysterious light still lingered on the horizon far away where earth and sea met in a haze of purple and indigo.

From the little garden down below there arose the subtle fragrance of early Spring—of wet earth and budding trees; and the dim veiled distance was full of strange sweet sounds, the call of night birds, the shriek of seagulls astray from their usual haunts.

Gilda looked out and listened, unable to understand this vague sense of oppression and of foreboding. When she put her finger up to her eyes, she found them wet with tears.

Memories rose from out the past, sad fantoms that hovered in the scent of the

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Spring. Gilda had never wholly forgotten the man who had once filled her heart with his personality; much less could she chase away his image from her mind, now that a future of misery and disgrace was all that was left to him.

She did not know what had become of him, and dared not ask for news. Mynheer Beresteyn, loyal to the house of Nassau and to its Prince, had cast out of his heart the sons of John of Barneveld whom he had once loved. Assassins and traitors, he would with his own lips have condemned them to the block, or denounced them to the vengeance of the Stadtholder for their treachery against Maurice of Nassau.

The feeling of uncertainty as to Stoutenburg's fate softened Gilda's heart toward him. She knew that he had become a wanderer on the face of the earth, Cain-like, homeless, friendless, practically kinless. She pitied him far more than she did Groeneveld or the others who were looking death quite closely in the face.

She was infinitely sorry for him; for him and for his wife, for whose sake he had been false to his first love. The gentle murmur of the breeze, the distant call of the waterfowl, seemed to bring back to Gilda's ears those whisperings of ardent passion which had come from Stoutenburg's lips years ago. She had listened to them with joy then, with glowing eyes cast down and cheeks that flamed up at his words.

And as she listened to these dream-sounds, others more concrete mingled with the mystic ones far away—the sound of stealthy footsteps upon the flagged path of the garden, and of a human being breathing and panting somewhere close by, still hidden by the gathering shadows of the night.

She held her breath to listen, not at all frightened; for the sound of those footsteps, the presence of that human creature close by, were in tune with her mood of expectancy of something that was foredoomed to come.

Suddenly the breeze brought to her ear the murmur of her name, whispered as if in an agony of pleading—

"Gilda!"

SHE leaned right out of the window. Her eyes, better accustomed to the dim evening light, perceived a human figure that crouched against the yew hedge, in the fantastic shadow cast by the quaintly shaped peacock at the corner close to the house.

"Gilda!" came the murmur again, more insistent this time.

"Who goes there?" she called in response; and it was an undefinable instinct stronger than her will that caused her to drop her own voice also to a whisper.

"A fugitive hunted to his death," came the response, scarce louder than the breeze. "Give me shelter, Gilda! Human blood-hounds are on my track."

Gilda's heart seemed to stop its beating: the human figure out there in the shadows had crept stealthily nearer. The window out of which she leaned was only a few feet from the ground; she stretched out her hand into the night.

"There is a projection in the wall just there," she whispered hurriedly, "and the ivy stems will help you. . . . Come!"

The fugitive grasped the hand that was stretched out to him in pitying helpfulness. With the aid of the projection in the wall and of the stems of the century-old ivy, he soon cleared the distance which separated him from the window sill. The next moment he had jumped into the room.

Gilda in this impulsive act of mercy had not paused to consider either the risks or the cost. She had recognized the voice of the man whom she had once loved. That voice called to her out of the depths of boundless misery. It was the call of a man at bay, a human quarry hunted and exhausted, with the hunters close upon his heels. She could not have resisted that call even if she had allowed her reason to fight her instinct then.

But now that he stood before her—in rough fisherman's clothes, stained and torn, his face covered with blood and grime, his eyes red and swollen, the breath coming in quick, short gasps through his blue, cracked lips—the first sense of fear at what she had done seized hold of her heart.

At first he took no notice of her, but threw himself into the nearest chair and passed his hands across his face and brow.

"Oh, my Heaven!" he murmured. "I thought they would have me tonight."

She stood in the middle of the room, feeling helpless and bewildered. She was full of pity for the man—for there is nothing more unutterably pathetic than the hunted human creature in its final stage of apathetic exhaustion—but she was just beginning

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to coördinate her thoughts and they for the moment were being invaded by fear.

She felt more than she saw that presently he turned his hollow, purple-rimmed eyes upon her, and that in them there was a glow half of passionate will power and half of anxious, agonizing doubt.

"Of what are you afraid, Gilda?" he asked suddenly. "Surely not of me?"

"Not of you, my lord," she replied quietly; "only for you."

"I am a miserable outlaw now, Gilda," he rejoined bitterly. "Four thousand golden guilders await any lout who chooses to sell me for a competence."

"I know that, my lord . . . and marvel why you are here. I heard that you were safe—in Belgium."

He laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"I was safe there," he said, "but I could not rest. I came back a few days ago, thinking I could help my brother to escape. Bah!" he added roughly. "He is a sniveling coward."

"Hush, for pity's sake," she exclaimed. "Some one will hear you."

"Close that window and lock the door," he murmured hoarsely. "I am spent, and could not resist a child if it chose to drag me at this moment to the Stadtholder's spies."

Gilda obeyed him mechanically. First she closed the window; then she went to the door, listening against the panel with all her senses on the alert. At the farther end of the passage was the living-room, where her father must still be sitting after his supper, poring over a book on horticulture or mayhap attending to his tulip bulbs. If he knew that the would-be murderer of the Stadtholder, the prime mover and instigator of the dastardly plot, was here in his house, in his daughter's chamber . . . Gilda shuddered, half fainting with terror, and her trembling fingers fumbled with the lock.

"Is Nicolaes home?" asked Stoutenburg suddenly.

"Not just now," she replied, "but he, too, will be home anon. . . . My father is at home. . . ."

"Ah! . . . Nicolaes is my friend. . . . I counted on seeing him here. . . . He would help me, I know. . . . But your father, Gilda, would drag me to the gallows with his own hand if he knew that I am here."

"You must not count on Nicolaes either, my lord," she pleaded, "nor must you stay here a moment longer. . . . I heard my father's step in the passage just now. He is sure to come and bid me good night before he goes to bed. . . ."

"I am spent, Gilda," he murmured, and indeed his breath came in such short and feeble gasps that he could scarce speak. "I have not touched food for two days. I landed at Scheveningen a week ago and for five days have hung about the Gevangen Poort of 'S Gravenhage trying to get speech with my brother. I had gained the good will of an important official in the prison, but Groeneveld is too much of a coward to make a fight for freedom.

"Then I was recognized by a group of workmen outside my dead father's house. I read recognition in their eyes—knowledge of me and knowledge of the money which that recognition might mean to them. They feigned indifference at first, but I had read their thoughts. They drew together to concert their future actions and I took to my heels.

"That was yesterday at noon, and I have been running ever since—running, running, with but brief intervals to regain my breath and beg for a drink of water—when thirst became more unendurable than the thought of capture. I did not even know which way I was running till I saw the spires of Haarlem rising from out the evening haze. Then I thought of you, Gilda, and of this house.

"You would not sell me, Gilda, for you are rich, and you loved me once," he added hoarsely, while his thin, grimy hands clutched the arms of the chair. He half raised himself from his seat, as if ready to spring up and to start running again, running, running until he dropped.

But obviously his strength was exhausted, for the next moment he fell back against the cushions. The swollen lids fell upon the hollow eyes, the sunken cheeks and parched lips became ashen white. Ill as he had treated her, Gilda felt a profound compassion for the hunted outcast.

"Water!" he murmured.

She administered to him kindly and gently, first holding the water to his lips. Then, when he had quenched that raging thirst, she pulled the table up close to his chair, and gave him milk to drink and bread and meat to eat.

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HE SEEMED quite dazed, conscious only of bodily needs, for he ate and drank ravenously without thought at first of thanking her. Only when he had finished did he lean back once again against the cushions which her kindly hand had placed behind him, and he murmured feebly like a tired but satisfied child.

"You are an angel of goodness, Gilda. Had you not helped me tonight I should either have perished in a ditch or fallen into the hands of the Stadtholder's minions."

Quickly she put a restraining hand on his shoulder. A firm step had echoed in the flagged corridor beyond the oaken door.

"My father!" whispered Gilda.

In a moment the instinct for life and liberty was fully aroused in the fugitive. His apathy and exhaustion were forgotten. Terror, mad, unreasoning terror, had once more taken possession of his mind.

"Hide me, Gilda!" he entreated hoarsely, and his hands clutched wildly at her gown. "Don't let him see me. . . . He would give me up. . . . He would give me up. . . ."

"Hush, in the name of Heaven!" she commanded. "He will hear you if you speak."

Swiftly she blew out the candles. Then, with dilated, anxious eyes she searched the recesses of the room for a hiding-place —the cupboard, which was too small; the wide hearth, which was too exposed; the bed in the wall. . . .

His knees had given way under him, and as he clutched at her gown he fell forward at her feet and remained there crouching, trembling, his circled eyes trying to pierce the surrounding gloom, to locate the position of the door behind which lurked the most immediate danger.

"Hide me, Gilda," he murmured almost inaudibly under his breath, "for the love you bore me once!"

"Gilda!" came a loud, kindly voice from the other side of the door.

"Yes, father!"

"You are not yet abed, are you, my girl?"

"I have just blown out the candles, dear," she contrived to reply with a fairly steady voice.

"Why is your door locked?"

"I was a little nervous tonight, father dear. I don't know why."

"Well, open then and say good night."

"One moment, dear."

She was white to the lips, white as the gown which fell in straight heavy folds from her hips, and which Stoutenburg was still clutching with convulsive fingers. Alone, her white figure detached itself from the darkness around. The wretched man as he looked up could see her small, pale head, the stiff collar that rose above her shoulders, her embroidered corselet, and the row of pearls around her neck.

"Save me, Gilda," he repeated with the agony of despair. "Do not let your father hand me over to the Stadtholder. . . . There will be no mercy for me, Gilda. . . . Hide me. . . . Hide me. . . . For the love of Heaven!"

Noiselessly she glided across the room, dragging him after her by the hand. She pulled aside the bed curtains and without a word pointed to the recess. The bed, built into the wall, was narrow but sure; it smelled sweetly of lavender. The hunted man, his every sense blurred by that overwhelming desire to save his life at any cost, accepted the shelter so innocently offered him. Gathering his long limbs together, he was soon hidden underneath the coverlet.

"Gilda!" came more insistently from behind the heavy door.

"One moment, father. I was fastening my gown."

"Don't trouble to do that. I only wished to say good night."

She pulled the curtains together very carefully in front of the bed; she even took the precaution of taking off her stiff collar and embroidered corselet. Then she lighted one of the candles, and with it in her hand she went to the door.

Then she drew back the bolt.

"May I not come in?" said Mynheer Beresteyn gaily, for she had remained standing on the threshold.

"Well, no, father!" she replied. "My room is very untidy. . . . I was just getting into bed. . . ."

"Just getting into bed!" he retorted with a laugh. "Why, child, you have not begun to undress."

"I wished to undress in the dark. My head aches terribly. . . . It must be the Spring air. . . . Good night, dear."

"Good night, little one!" said Beresteyn as he kissed his daughter tenderly.

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"Nicolaes has just come home," he added. "He wanted to see you too."

"Ask him to wait till tomorrow then. My head feels heavy. I can scarcely hold it up."

"You are not ill, little one?" asked the father anxiously.

"No, no; only oppressed with this first hot breath of Spring."

"Why is not Maria here to undress you? I'll send her."

"Not just now, father. She will come presently. Her chattering wearied me and I sent her away."

"Well, good night again, my girl. God bless you. You will not see Nicolaes?"

"Not tonight, father. Tell him I am not well. Good night."

Mynheer Beresteyn went away at last, but not before Gilda feared that she must drop or faint under the stress of this nerve-racking situation.

Even now, when at last she was alone, when once again she was able to close and bolt the door, she could scarcely stand. She leaned against the wall with eyes closed and heart that beat so furiously and so fast that she thought she must choke.

THE sound of her father's footsteps died away along the corridor. She heard him opening and shutting a door at the farther end of the passage, where there were two or three living-rooms and his own sleeping-chamber. For a while now the house was still, so still that she could almost hear those furious heart-beats beneath her gown. Then only did she dare to move. With noiseless steps she crossed the room to that recess in the wall hidden by the gay-flowered linen curtains.

She paused close beside these.

"My lord!" she called softly.

No answer.

"My lord! My father has gone. You are in no danger for the moment."

Still no answer; and as she paused, straining her ears to listen, she caught the sound of slow and regular breathing. Going back to the table she took up the candle. Then, with it in her hand, she returned to the recess and gently drew aside the curtain. The light from the candle fell full upon Stoutenburg's face.

Inexpressibly weary, exhausted both bodily and mentally, not even the imminence of present danger had succeeded in keeping him awake. The moment that he felt the downy pillow under his head he had dropped off to sleep as peacefully as he used to do years ago, before the shadow of premeditated crime had left its impress on his wan face.

Gilda, looking down on him, sought in vain in the harsh and haggard features the traces of those boyish good looks which had fascinated her years ago. She tried in vain to read on those thin, set lips the words of passionate affection which had so readily flown from them then.

She put down the candle again and drew a chair close to the bed. Then she sat down and waited.

And he slept on calmly, watched over by the woman whom he had so heartlessly betrayed. All love for him had died out in her heart ere this, but pity was there now and she was thankful that it had been in her power to aid him at the moment of his direst peril.

But that danger still existed, of course. The household was still astir and the servants not yet all abed. Gilda could hear Jakob, the old henchman, making his rounds, seeing that all the lights were safely out, all the bolts pushed home and chains securely fastened, and Maria might come back at any moment, wondering why her mistress had not yet sent for her. Nicolaes, too, was at home, and had already said that he wished to see his sister.

She tried to arouse the sleeping man, but he lay there like a log. She dared not speak loudly to him or to call his name, and all her efforts at shaking him by the shoulder failed to awaken him.

Lonely and seriously frightened now, Gilda fell on her knees beside the bed. Clasping her hands she tried to pray. Surely God could not leave a young girl in such dire perplexity, when her only sin had been an act of mercy. The candle on the bureau close by burned low in its socket and its flickering light outlined her delicate profile and the soft tendrils of her coiffure.

Her eyes were closed in the endeavor to concentrate her thoughts and time flew by swiftly while she tried to pray. She did not perceive that after a while the Lord of Stoutenburg awoke and that he remained for a long time in mute contemplation of the exquisite picture which she presented,

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clad all in white, with the string of pearls still around her throat, her hands clasped, her lips parted, breathing a silent prayer.

"How beautiful you are, Gilda!" he murmured quite involuntarily at last.

Then as, suddenly startled and terrified, she tried to jump up quickly, away from him, he put out his hand and succeeded in capturing her wrists, thus holding her pinioned and still kneeling close beside him.

"An angel of goodness," he said, "and exquisitely beautiful!"

At his words, at the renewed pressure of his hand upon her wrists, she made a violent effort to recover her composure.

"I pray you, my lord, let go my hands. They were clasped in prayer for your safety. You slept so soundly that I feared I could not waken you in order to tell you that you must leave this house instantly."

"I will go, Gilda," he said quietly, making no attempt to move or to relax his hold on her, "for this brief interval of sleep, your kind ministrations and the food you gave me have already put new strength into me. And the sight of you kneeling and praying near me has put life into me again."

"Then since you are better," she rejoined coldly, "I pray you rise, my lord, and make ready to go. The garden is quite lonely, the Oude Gracht at its farthest boundary is more lonely still. The hour is late and the city is asleep. You would be quite safe now."

"Do not send me away yet, Gilda, just when a breath of happiness—the first I have had for four years—has been wafted from heaven upon me. May I not stay here a while and live for a brief moment in a dream which is born of unforgettable memories?"

"It is not safe for you to stay here, my lord," she said coldly.

"My lord? You used to call me Willem once."

"That was long ago, my lord, ere you gave Walburg de Marnix the sole right to call you by tender names."

"She has deserted me, Gilda—fled from me like a coward, leaving me to bear my misery alone."

"She shared your misery for four years, my lord. It was your disgrace that she could not endure."

"You knew then that she had left me?"

"My father had heard of it."

"Then you know that I am a free man again?"

"It is more than likely that the law will soon make you so."

"The law has already freed me through Walburg's own act of desertion. You know our laws as well as I do, Gilda. If you have any doubt ask your own father, whose business it is to administer them. Walburg de Marnix has set me free, free to begin a new life, free to follow at last the dictates of my heart."

"For the moment, my lord," she retorted coldly, "you are not free even to live your old life."

"I would not live it again, Gilda, now that I have seen you again. The past seems even now to be falling away from me. Dreams and memories are stronger than reality. And you, Gilda . . . have you forgotten?"

"I have forgotten nothing, my lord."

"Our love, your vows, that day in June when you yielded your lips to my kiss?"

"Nor that dull autumnal day, my lord, when I heard from the lips of strangers that in order to further your own ambitious schemes you had cast me aside like a useless shoe, and had married another woman who was richer and of nobler birth than I."

SHE had at last succeeded in freeing herself from his grasp, and had risen to her feet and retreated farther and farther away from him until she stood up now against the opposite wall, her slender, white form lost in the darkness, her whispered words striking clearly on his ear.

He too arose from the bed and drew up his tall, lean figure with a gesture still expressive of that ruthless ambition with which Gilda had taunted him.

"My marriage then was pure expediency, Gilda," he said with a shrug of the shoulders. "My father, whose differences with the Stadtholder were reaching their acutest stage, had need of the influence of Marnix de St. Aldegonde. My marriage with Walburg de Marnix was done in my father's interests and went sorely against my heart. It is meet and natural that she herself should have severed a tie which was one only in name. A year from now the law grants me freedom to contract a new marriage tie; my love for you, Gilda, is unchanged."

"And mine for you, my lord, is dead."

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He gave a short, low laugh in which there rang a strange note of triumph.

"Dormant mayhap, Gilda," he said as he groped his way across the darkened room and tried to approach her. "Your ears have been poisoned by your father's hatred of me. Let me but hold you once more in my arms, let me but speak to you once again of the past, and you will forget all save your real love for me."

"All this is senseless talk, my lord," she said coldly. "Your life at this moment hangs upon the finest thread that destiny can weave. Human bloodhounds, you said, were upon your track. They have not wholly lost the scent, remember."

Her self-possession acted like a fall of icy cold water upon the ardor of his temper. Once more that hunted look came into his face. He cast furtive, frightened glances around him, peering into the gloom as if enemies might be lurking in every dark recess.

"They shall not have me," he muttered through set teeth. "Not tonight—not now that life again holds out to me a cup brimful of happiness. I will go, Gilda, just as you command. They shall not find me. I have something to live for now—you and revenge. My father, my brother, my friends, I shall avenge them all. That treacherous Stadtholder shall not escape from my hatred the second time. Then will I have power, wealth, a great name, to offer you. Gilda, you will remember me?"

"I will remember you, my lord, as one who has passed out of my life. My playmate of long ago, the man whom I once loved, is dead to me. He who would stain his hands with blood is hateful in my sight. Go, go, my lord, I entreat you, ere you make my task of helping you to life and safety harder than I can bear."

She ran to the window and threw it open; then pointed out into the night.

"There lies your way, my lord. Only God knows if I do right in not denouncing you even now to my father."

"You will not denounce me, Gilda," he said, drawing quite near to her, now that he could see her graceful figure silhouetted against the star-lit sky. "You will not denounce me; for unknown, mayhap even to yourself, your love for me is far from dead.

"As for me, I feel that I have never loved as I love you now. Your presence has intoxicated me, your nearness fills my brain as with a subtle, aromatic wine. All thought of my own danger fades before my longing to hold you just for one instant close to my heart, to press for one brief yet eternal second my lips against yours. Gilda, I love you!"

His arms quickly closed around her. She felt his hot breath against her cheek. For one moment did she close her eyes, for she felt sick and faint. But the stanch valor of that same Dutch blood which had striven and fought and endured and conquered throughout the ages past gave her just that courage, just that presence of mind which she needed.

"If you do not release me instantly," she said firmly, "I will arouse the house with one call."

Then, as his arms instinctively dropped away from her, and he drew back with a muttered curse—

"Go!" she said, once more pointing toward the peaceful and distant horizon, now wrapped in the veil of night. "Go, while I still have the strength to keep silent, save for a prayer for your safety."

Her attitude was so firm, her figure so rigid, that he knew that inevitably he must obey. His life was in danger, not hers; and she had of a truth but little to fear from him. He bowed his head in submission and humility. Then he bent the knee and raising her gown to his lips he imprinted a kiss upon the hem. The next moment he had swung himself lightly upon the window sill, whence he dropped softly upon the ground below.

For a few minutes longer she remained standing beside the open window, listening to his footfall on the flagged path. She could just distinguish his moving form from the surrounding gloom, as he crept along the shadows toward the boundary of the garden. Then as, for one brief moment, she saw his figure outlined above the garden wall, she closed the window very slowly and turned away from it.

The next moment she was lying in a swoon across the floor of her room.

CHAPTER I

NEW YEAR'S EVE

IF THE snow had come down again or the weather been colder, or wetter, or other than it was. . . .

If one of the three men had been more thirsty, or the other more insistent. . . .

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If it had been any other day of the year, or any other hour of any other day. . . .

If the three philosophers had taken their walk abroad in any other portion of the city of Haarlem. . . .

If . . .

Nay! But there's no end to the ifs which I might adduce in order to prove to you beyond a doubt that but for an extraordinary conglomeration of minor circumstances, the events which I am about to relate neither would nor could ever have taken place.

For indeed you must admit that had the snow come down again, or the weather been colder, or wetter, the three philosophers would mayhap all have felt that priceless thirst and desire for comfort which the interior of a well administered tavern doth so marvelously assuage. And had it been any other day of the year or any other hour of that same last day of the year 1623, those three philosophers would never have thought of wiling away the penultimate hour of the dying year by hanging round the Grootemarkt in order to see the respectable mynheer burghers and the mevrouws their wives filing into the cathedral in a sober and orderly procession, with large silver-clasped Bibles under their arms, and an air of satisfied unctuousness upon their faces, suited to the solemn occasion of watch-night service, and the desire to put themselves right with Heaven before commencing a New Year of commercial and industrial activity.

And had those three philosophers not felt any desire to watch this same orderly procession they would probably have taken their walk abroad in another portion of the city, whence. . . .

But now I am anticipating.

Events crowded in so thickly and so fast, during the last hour of the departing year and the first of the newly born one, that it were best mayhap to proceed with their relation in the order in which they occurred.

For, look you, the links of a mighty chain had their origin on the steps of the Stadhuis, for it is at the foot of these that three men were standing precisely at the moment when the bell of the cathedral struck the penultimate hour of the last day of the year 1623.

Mynheer van der Meer, Burgomaster of Haarlem, was coming down those same steps in the company of Mynheer van Zilcken, Mynheer Beresteyn and other worthy gentlemen, all members of the Town Council and all noted for their fine collections of rare tulips, the finest in the whole of the Province of Holland.

There was great rivalry between Mynheer van der Meer, Mynheer van Zilcken and Mynheer Beresteyn on the subject of their tulip bulbs, on which they expended thousands of florins every year. Some people held that the Burgomaster had exhibited finer specimens of *Semper Augustus* than any horticulturist in the land, while others thought that the *Schwarzer Kato* shown by Mynheer Beresteyn had been absolutely without a rival.

And as this group of noble Councilors descended the steps of the Stadhuis, preparatory to joining their wives at home and thence escorting them to the watch-night service at the cathedral, their talk was of tulips and of tulip bulbs, of the specimens which they possessed and the prices which they had paid for these.

"Fourteen thousand florins did I pay for my *Schwarzer Kato*," said Mynheer Beresteyn complacently, "and now I would not sell it for twenty thousand."

"There's a man up at Overveen who has a new hybrid now, a sort of *Schone Juffrouw*. The bulb has matured to perfection. He is putting it up for auction next week," said Mynheer van Zilcken.

"It will fetch in the open market sixteen thousand at least," commented Mynheer van der Meer sententiously.

"I would give that for it and more," rejoined the other, "if it is as perfect as the man declares it to be."

"Too late," now interposed Mynheer Beresteyn with a curt laugh. "I purchased the bulb from the man at Overveen this afternoon. He did not exaggerate its merits. I never saw a finer bulb."

"You bought it?" exclaimed the Burgomaster in tones that were anything but friendly toward his fellow Councilor.

"This very afternoon," replied the other. "I have it in the inner pocket of my doublet at this moment."

And he pressed his hand to his side, making sure that the precious bulb still reposed next to his heart.

"I gave the lout fifteen thousand florins for it," he added airily. "He was glad not to take the risks of an auction, and I equally glad to steal a march on my friends."

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THE three men who were leaning up against the wall of the Stadhuis, and who had overheard this conversation, declared subsequently that they learned then and there an entirely new and absolutely comprehensive string of oaths, the sound of which they had never even known of before, from the two solemn and sober Town Councilors who found themselves balked of a coveted prize. But this I do not altogether believe; for the three eavesdroppers had already forgotten more about swearing than all the burghers of Haarlem put together had ever known.

In the meanwhile the Town Councilors had reached the foot of the steps. Here they parted company and there was a marked coldness in the manner of some of them toward Mynheer Beresteyn, who still pressed his hand against his doublet, in the inner pocket of which reposed a bit of dormant vegetation for which he had that same afternoon paid no less a sum than fifteen thousand florins.

"There goes a lucky devil," said a mocking voice, in tones wherein ripples of laughter struggled forever for mastery. It came from one of the three men who had listened to the conversation between the Town Councilors on the subject of tulips and of tulip bulbs.

"To think," he continued, "that I have never even seen as much as fifteen thousand florins all at once! By St. Bavon himself do I swear that for the mere handling of so much money I would be capable of the most heroic deeds . . . such as killing my worst enemy . . . or . . . or . . . knocking that obese and self-complacent Councilor yonder in the stomach."

"Say but the word, good Diogenes," said a gruff voice in response. "The lucky devil ye speak of need not remain long in possession of that bulb. He hath name Beresteyn. . . . I think I know whereabouts he lives. . . . The hour is late, the fog fairly dense in the narrow streets of the city. Say but the word. . . ."

"There is an honest man I wot of in Amsterdam," broke in a third voice, one which was curiously high-pitched and dulcet in its tone; "an honest dealer who would gladly give a couple of thousands for the bulb and ask no impertinent questions."

"Say but the word, Diogenes. . . ." reiterated the gruff voice solemnly.

"And the bulb is ours," concluded the third speaker in his quaint, high-pitched voice.

"And three philosophers will begin the New Year with more money in their wallets than they would know what to do with," said he of the laughter-filled voice. "'Tis a sound scheme, O Pythagoras, and one that under certain circumstances would certainly commend itself to me. But just now. . . ."

"Well?" queried the two voices—the gruff and the high-pitched—simultaneously, like a bassoon and a flute in harmony. "Just now what?"

"Just now, worthy Socrates and wise Pythagoras, I have three whole florins in my wallet, and my most pressing creditor died a month ago—shot by a Spanish harquebus at the storming of Breda. He fell like a hero—God rest his soul! But as to me, I can afford for a little while—at any rate for tonight—to act like a gentleman rather than a common thief."

"Bah!" came in muffled and gruff tones of disgust. "You might lend me those three florins— 'twere the act of a gentleman. . . ."

"An act, moreover, which would effectually free me from further scruples, eh?" laughed the other gaily.

"The place is dull," interposed the flute-like tones. "'Twill be duller still if unworthy scruples do cause us to act like gentlemen."

"Why, 'tis the very novelty of the game that will save our lives from dulness," said Diogenes lightly. "Just let us pretend to be gentlemen for this one night. I assure you that, good philosophers though we both are, you will find zest in the entertainment."

It is doubtful whether this form of argument would have appealed to the two philosophers in question. The point was never settled, for at that precise moment Chance took it on herself to forge the second link in that remarkable chain of events which I have made it my duty to relate.

From across the Grootemarkt, there where stands the cathedral backed by a network of narrow streets, there came a series of ear-piercing shrieks, accompanied by threatening cries and occasional outbursts of rough, mocking laughter.

"A row," said Socrates laconically.

"A fight," suggested Pythagoras.

Diogenes said nothing. He was already half way across the Markt. The others followed him as closely as they could. His

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figure, which was unusually tall and broad, loomed weirdly out of the darkness and the fog ahead of them, and his voice, with that perpetual undertone of merriment rippling through it, called to them from time to time.

Now he stopped, waiting for his companions. The ear-piercing shrieks, the screams and mocking laughter, came more distinctly to their ears; and from the several by-streets that gave on the market place people came hurrying along, attracted by the noise.

"Let us go 'round behind the Fleischmarkt," said Diogenes, as soon as his two friends had come within earshot of him, "and reach the rear of the cathedral that way. Unless I am greatly mistaken the seat of yonder quarrel is by a small postern gate which I spied a while ago at the corner of Dam Straat and where methinks I saw a number of men and women furtively gaining admittance. They looked uncommonly like Papists and the postern gate not unlike a Romanist chapel door."

"Then there undoubtedly will be a row," said Socrates dryly.

"And we are no longer likely to find the place dull," concluded Pythagoras in a flute-like voice.

AND the three men, pulling their plumed hats well over their eyes, turned off without hesitation in the wake of their leader. They had by tacit understanding unsheathed their swords and were carrying them under the folds of their mantles. They walked in single file, for the street was very narrow, the gabled roofs almost meeting overhead at the apex. Their firm footsteps made no sound on the thick carpet of snow. The street was quite deserted and the confused tumult in the Dam Straat came now only as a faint and distant echo.

Thus walking with rapid strides, the three men soon found themselves once more close to the cathedral. It loomed out of the fog on their left. The cries and the laughter on ahead sounded once more clear and shrill.

The words, "For the love of Christ!" could be easily distinguished; uttered pleadingly at intervals, and by a woman's voice, they sounded ominous, more especially as they were invariably followed by cries of "Spaniards! Spies! Papists!" and a renewal of loud and ribald laughter.

The leader of the little party had paused once more. His long legs evidently carried him away faster than he intended. Now he turned to his friends and pointed with his hand and sword on ahead.

"Now, wise Pythagoras," he said, "wilt thou not have enjoyment and to spare this night? Thou didst shower curses on this fog-ridden country, and call it insufferably dull. Lo, what a pleasing picture doth present itself to our gaze!"

Whether the picture was pleasing or not depended entirely upon the point of view of spectator or participant. Certes it was animated and moving and picturesque; and as three pairs of eyes, beneath three broad-brimmed hats, took in its several details, three muffled figures uttered three simultaneous gurgles of anticipated pleasure.

In the fog that hung thickly in the narrow street it was at first difficult to distinguish exactly what was going on. Certain it is that a fairly dense crowd, which swelled visibly every moment as idlers joined in from many sides, had congregated at the corner of Dam Straat, where a couple of resin torches fixed in iron brackets against a tall, stuccoed wall shed a flickering and elusive light on the forms and faces of a group of men in the forefront of the throng.

The faces thus exposed to view appeared to be flushed and heated—either with wine or ebullient temper—whilst the upraised arms, the clenched fists and brandished staves showed a rampant desire to do mischief.

There was a low postern gate in the wall just below the resin torches. The gate was open and in the darkness beyond vague, moving forms could be seen huddled together in what looked like a narrow, unlighted passage. It was from this huddled mass of humanity that the wails and calls for divine protection proceeded, whilst the laughter and the threats came from the crowd.

From beneath three broad-brimmed hats there once more came three distinct chuckles of delight and three muffled figures hugged naked swords more tightly under their cloaks.

CHAPTER II

THE FRACAS BY THE POSTERN GATE

THUS am I proved right in saying that, but for the conglomeration of minor circumstances within the past half hour, the great events which subsequently linked the

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fate of a penniless foreign adventurer with that of a highly honorable and highly esteemed family of Haarlem never would or could have occurred.

For, had the three philosophers adhered to their usual custom of retiring to the warmth and comfort of "The Lame Cow" situate in the Kleine Hout Straat, as soon as the streets no longer presented an agreeable lolling-place, they would never have known of the tumult that went on at this hour under the very shadow of the cathedral.

But seeing it all going on before them, what could they do but join in the fun?

The details of the picture which had the low postern gate for its central interest were gradually becoming more defined. Now the figure of a woman showed clearly under the flickering light of the resin torches —a woman with rough, dark hair that hung loosely around her face; and bare arms and legs, of which the flesh, blue with cold, gleamed weirdly against the dark oak paneling of the gate.

She was stooping forward, with arms outstretched and feet that vainly tried to keep a foothold of the ground which snow and frost had rendered slippery. The hands themselves were not visible, for one of them was lost in the shadows behind her and the other disappeared in the grip of six or eight rough hands.

Through the mist and in the darkness it was impossible to see whether the woman was young or old, handsome or ill favored, but her attitude was unmistakable. The men in the forefront of the crowd were trying to drag her away from the shelter of the gate, to which she clung with desperate obstinacy.

Her repeated cries of "For the love of Christ!" provoked only loud and bibulous laughter. Obviously she was losing her hold of the ground, and was gradually being dragged out into the open.

"For the love of Christ, let me go, kind sirs!"

"Come out quietly then," retorted one of the men in front. "Let's have a look at you."

"We only want to see the color of your eyes," said another with mock gallantry.

"Are you Spanish spies or are you not? That's all that we want to know," added a third. "How many black-eyed wenches are there among ye? Papists we know you are."

"Papists! Spanish spies!" roared the crowd in unison.

"Shall we bait the Papists too, O Diogenes?" came in dulcet tones from out the shadow of the stuccoed wall.

"Bah! Women and old men, and only twenty of these," said his companion with a laugh and a shrug of his broad shoulders, "whilst there are at least a hundred of the others."

"More amusing certainly," growled Socrates under the brim of his hat.

"For the love of Christ!" wailed the woman piteously, as her bare feet, buried in the snow, finally slid away from the protecting threshold, and she appeared in the full light of the resin torches, with black, unkempt hair, ragged shift and kirtle and a wild, terror-stricken look in her black eyes.

"Black eyes! I guessed as much!" shouted one of the men excitedly. "Spaniards, I tell you, friends! Spanish spies all of them! Out you come, wench! Out you come!"

"Out you come!" yelled the crowd. "Papists! Spanish spies!"

The woman gave a scream of wild terror as half a dozen stones, hurled from the rear of the crowd over the heads of the ringleaders, came crashing against the wall and the gate all around her.

One of these stones was caught in mid air.

"I thank thee, friend," cried a loud, mocking voice that rang clearly above the din. "My nose was itching and thou didst strive to tickle it most effectually. Tell me, does thine itch too? Here's a good cloth wherewith to wipe it."

And the stone was hurled back into the thick of the crowd by a sure and vigorous hand, even whilst a prolonged and merry laugh echoed above the groans and curses of the throng.

For an instant after that the shouts and curses were still. The crowd, as is usual in such cases, paused to see whence this unexpected diversion had come. But all that could be seen for the moment was a dark, compact mass of plumed hats and mantles standing against the wall, and a triple glint as of steel peeping from out the shadows.

"By St. Bavon, the patron saint of this goodly city, but here's a feast for philosophers!" said that same laughter-loving voice. "Four worthy burghers grappling with a maid! Let go her arm, I say, or four pairs of hands will presently litter the

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corner of this street, and forty fingers be scattered amongst the refuse.

"Pythagoras, wilt take me at two guilders to three that I can cut off two of these ugly, red hands with one stroke of Bucephalus whilst Socrates and thou thyself wilt only account for one apiece?"

WHILST the merry voice went rippling on in pleasant, mocking tones, the crowd had had ample time to recover itself and to shake off its surprise. The four stalwarts in front swore a very comprehensive if heterogeneous oath. One of them did certainly let go the wench's arm somewhat hastily, but seeing that his companions had recovered courage and the use of their tongue, he swore once again and more loudly this time.

"By that same St. Bavon," he shouted, "who is this *smeerlap* whose interference I for one deeply resent? Come out, girl, and show thyself at once. We'll deal with thy protector later."

After which there were some lusty shouts of applause at this determined attitude, shouts that were interrupted by a dulcet, high-pitched voice saying quietly:

"I take thee, friend Diogenes. Two guilders to three. Do thou strike at the pair of hands nearest to thee and while I count three. . . ."

From the torches up above there came a sharp glint of light as it struck three steel blades that swung out into the open.

"One—two——"

Four pairs of hands which had been dragging on the woman's arm with such determined force disappeared precipitately into the darkness; and, thus suddenly released, the woman nearly fell backward against the gate.

"Pity!" said the dulcet voice gently. "That bet will never be decided now."

An angry murmur of protest rose from the crowd. The four men who had been the leaders of the gang were pushed forward from the rear amid shouts of derision and brandishing of fists.

"Cowards! Cowards! Cowards! Jan Tiele, art not ashamed? Piet, go for them! There are only three! Cowards, to let yourselves be bullied!"

The crowd pushed from behind. The street being narrow, it could express its desire for a fight only by murmurs and by shouts; it had no elbow room for it, and could only urge those in the forefront to pick a quarrel with the interfering strangers.

"The blessing of God upon thee, stranger, and of the Holy Virgin——" came in still quivering accents from out the darkness of the passage.

"Let the Holy Virgin help thee to hold thy tongue," retorted he who had name Diogenes, "and do thou let my friend Socrates close this confounded door."

"Jan Tiele!" shouted some one in the crowd. "Dost see what they are doing? The gate is being closed——"

"And bolted," said a flute-like voice.

"Stand aside, strangers!" yelled the crowd.

"We are not in your way," came in calm response.

The three muffled figures, side by side in close if somewhat unnumerical battle array, had taken their stand in front of the postern gate, the heavy bolts of which were heard falling into their sockets behind them with a loud clang. A quivering voice came at the last from behind the iron judas in the door.

"God will reward ye, strangers! We go pray for you to the Holy Virgin——"

"Nay!" rejoined Diogenes lightly. "'Twere wiser to pray for Jan Tiele, or for Piet or their mates—some of them will have need of prayers in about five minutes from now."

"Shame! Cowards! *Plepshurk!* At them, Jan! Piet! Willem!" shouted the crowd lustily.

Once more stones were freely hurled, followed by a regular fusillade of snowballs. One of these struck the crown of a plumed hat and knocked it off the wearer's head. A face, merry, a trifle fleshy perhaps, but with fine, straight brow, eyes that twinkled and mocked and a pair of full, joyous lips adorned by a fair upturned mustache, met the gaze of a hundred glowering eyes and towered half a head above the tallest man there.

As his hat fell to the ground, the man made a formal bow to the yelling and hooting crowd.

"Since one of you has been so kind as to lift my hat for me, allow me formally to present myself and my friends here. I am known to my compeers and to mine enemies as Diogenes," he said gravely, "a philosopher of whom mayhap ye have never heard. On my left stands Pythagoras, on my right Socrates.

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"We are all at your service, including even my best friend, who is slender and is made of steel and hath name Bucephalus; he tells me that within the next few minutes he means to become intimately acquainted with Dutch guts, unless ye disperse and go peaceably back to church and pray God to forgive ye this act of cowardice on New Year's Eve!"

The answer was another volley of stones, one of which hit Socrates on the side of the head.

"With the next stone that is hurled," continued Diogenes calmly, "I will smash Jan Tiele's nose; and if more than one come within reach of my hand, then Willem's nose shall go as well."

The warning was disregarded; a shower of stones came crashing against the wall just above the postern gate.

"How badly these Dutchmen throw," growled Socrates in his gruff voice.

"This present from the friends in the rear, Jan Tiele," rejoined Diogenes, as he seized that worthy by the collar and brandished a stone which he had caught in its flight. " 'Tis they, obviously, who do not like the shape of thy nose, else they had not sent me the wherewithal to flatten it for thee."

"I'll do that, good Diogenes," said Pythagoras gently, as he took both the stone and the struggling Jan Tiele from his friend's grasp, "and Socrates will see to Willem at the same time. No trouble, I give thee my word—I like to do this kind of jobs for my friends."

An awful and prolonged howl from Jan Tiele and from Willem testified that the jobs had been well done.

"Papists! Spaniards! Spies!" roared the crowd, now goaded to fury.

"Bucephalus, I do humbly beg thy pardon," said Diogenes, as he rested the point of his sword for one moment on the frozen ground, then raised it and touched it with his forehead and with his lips. "I apologize to thee for using thee against such rabble."

"More stones, please," came in a shrill falsetto from Pythagoras. "Here's Piet, whose nose is itching fit to make him swear."

He was a great adept at catching missiles in midair. These now flew thick and fast—stones, short staves, heavy leather pouches, as well as hard missiles made of frozen snow. But the throwers were hampered by one another; they had no elbow-room in this narrow street.

The missiles for the most part fell wide of the mark. Still, numbers might tell in the end. Socrates's face was streaming with blood; a clump of mud and snow had extinguished one of the torches, and a moment ago a stone had caught Diogenes on the left shoulder.

The three men stood close together, sword in hand. To the excited gaze of the crowd they scarcely seemed to be using their swords or to heed those of their aggressors who came threateningly nigh. They stood quite quietly up against the wall, making hardly a movement; their sword-hand and wrist never appeared to stir, but many who had been in the forefront had retired howling and the snow all around was deeply stained with red. Jan Tiele and Willem had broken noses and Piet had lost one ear.

The three men were hatless and the faces of two of them were smeared with blood. The third—taller and broader than the others—stood between them, and with those that pressed him closely he bandied mocking words.

"Spaniards! Papists!" yelled the crowd in a frenzy.

"If I hear those words again," he retorted pleasantly, "I'll run three of you through on Bucephalus as on a spit, and leave you thus ready for roasting. We are no Spaniards. My father was English and my friend Pythagoras here was born in a donkey shed, while Socrates first saw the light of day in a traveling menagerie. So we are none of us Spaniards, and you can all disperse."

"Papists!"

"And if I hear that again I'll send the lot of you to ——."

"Art thou Samson then, to think thyself so strong?" shouted a shrill voice close to him.

"Give me thy jawbone and I'll prove thee that I am," he retorted gaily.

"Spies!" they cried.

"*Dondersteen!*" he shouted in his turn, swearing lustily. "I am tired of this rabble. Disperse! Disperse, I tell ye! Bucephalus, my friend, wilt have a taste of Dutch guts? Another ear? A nose or two? What, ye will not go?"

"Spaniards! Spies! Papists!"

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THE crowd was gathering unto itself a kind of fury that greatly resembled courage. Those that were behind pushed and those that were in front could no longer retreat. Blood had begun to flow more freely and the groans of the wounded had roused the bellicose instincts of those whose skins were still whole.

One or two of the more venturesome had made close and gruesome acquaintance with the silent but swift Bucephalus, whilst from the market place in the rear the numbers of the crowd thus packed in this narrow street corner swelled dangerously. The newcomers did not know what had happened before their arrival. They could not see over the heads of the crowd what was going on at this moment. So they pushed from behind and the three combatants with their backs against the wall had much difficulty in keeping a sufficiently wide circle around them to allow their swords free play.

Already Socrates, dizzy from the blood that was streaming down his sharp, hooked nose, had failed to keep three of his foremost assailants at bay. He had been forced to yield one step and then another, and the elbow of his sword arm was now right up against the wall. Pythagoras, too, was equally closely pressed, and Diogenes had just sent an overbold lout sprawling on the ground.

The noise was deafening. Every one was shouting. Many were screaming or groaning. The town guard, realizing at last that a tumult of more than usual consequence was going on in some portion of the city, had decided to go and interfere. Their slow and weighty steps and the clang of their halberds could be heard from over the Grootemarkt during the rare moments when the shouts and clamor subsided for a few seconds, only to be upraised again with redoubled power.

Then suddenly cries of "Help!" were raised from the farther end of Dam Straat, where it debouches on the bank of the Spaarne. It was a woman's voice that raised the cry, but men answered it with calls for the guard. The tumult in front of the postern gate now reached its climax, for the pressure from behind had become terrible, and men and women were being knocked down and trampled on.

It seemed as if the narrow street could not hold another human soul, and yet apparently more and more were trying to squeeze into the restricted space. The trampled, frozen snow had become as slippery as a sheet of glass. If the guard with their wonted ponderous clumsiness charged into the crowd with halberds now, then Heaven help the weak who could not elbow a way out for themselves! They would be sure to be trampled under foot.

Every one knew that on such occasions many a corpse littered the roads when finally the crowd disappeared. Those of sober sense realized all this, but they were but small units in this multitude heated with its own rage, and intoxicated with the first hope of victory. The three strangers who bareheaded still held their ground with their backs to the wall were obviously getting exhausted.

But a little more determination — five minutes' respite before the arrival of the guard, a few more stones skilfully hurled— and the Papists, Spaniards or spies, whatever they were, would have paid dearly for their impudent interference.

"Papists, have ye had enough?" yelled the crowd in chorus as a stone well thrown hit the sword arm of the tallest of the three men—of him whose mocking voice had never ceased its incessant chatter.

"Not nearly enough," he replied loudly, as he quietly transferred faithful Bucephalus from his right hand to his left.

"We are just beginning to enjoy ourselves," came in dulcet tones from the small man beside him.

"At them! At them! Papists! Spies!"

Once more a volley of stones.

"*Dondersteen!* But methinks we might vary the entertainment," cried Diogenes lustily.

Quicker than a flash of lightning he turned and once more grasping Bucephalus in the partially disabled hand he tore with the other the resin torch out of its iron socket, and shouting to his two companions to hold their ground he waved the guttering lighted torch and charged straight into the crowd.

A wild cry of terror was raised, which echoed and reëchoed from one end of the street to the other, reverberated against the cathedral walls and caused all peaceable citizens who had found refuge in their homes to thank the Lord that they were safely within.

Diogenes, with fair hair fluttering over

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his brow, his twinkling eyes aglow with excitement, held the torch well in front of him. The sparks flew in all directions. The lustiest aggressors fled to right and left, shrieking with horror. Fire, that almost invincible weapon, had accomplished what the finest steel never could have done; it sobered and terrified the crowd, scattered it like a flock of sheep, sent it running hither and thither, rendering it helpless by fear.

In the space of three minutes the circle around the three combatants was several meters wide. Five minutes later the corner of the street was clear except for the wounded, who lay groaning on the ground; and one or two hideous rags of flesh that lay scattered among heaps of stones, torn wallets, staves and broken sticks.

From the precincts of the Grootemarkt the town guard were heard using rough language, violent oaths and pikes and halberds against the stragglers, who were only too eager now to go peaceably back to their homes. The fear of burned doublets or kirtles had effectually sobered these overflowing tempers. There had been enough Papist-baiting to please the most inveterate seeker after excitement this night.

A few youths, who mayhap earlier in the evening had indulged too freely in the taverns of the Grootemarkt, were for resuming the fun after the panic had subsided. A score or so of them talked it over under the shadow of the cathedral, but a detachment of the town guard spied their maneuvers and turned them all back into the marketplace.

The bell of the cathedral slowly struck the last hour of this memorable year. Through the open portals of the sacred edifice the cathedral choir was heard intoning the First Psalm.

Like frightened hens that have been scared and now venture out again, the worthy burghers of Haarlem sallied out from the by-streets into the Grootemarkt, on their way to watch-night service—Mynheer the Burgomaster and Mynheer the Town Advocate and the Mevrouws their wives, and the Town Councilors and the members of the shooting-guilds and the Governors and Governesses of the Almshouses.

With ponderous Bibles and prayer books under their arms and cloaks of fur closely wrapped around their shoulders, they once more filled the Grootemarkt with the atmosphere of their own solemnity. Their serving-men carried the torches in front of them. Waiting-women helped the Mevrouws in their unwieldy farthingales to walk on the slippery ground with becoming sobriety.

The cathedral bells sent forth a merry peal to greet the incoming year.

CHAPTER III

AN INTERLUDE

AND at the corner of Dam Straat, where the low postern gate cuts into the tall stuccoed wall, there once more reigned silence as of the grave.

Those who were hurt and wounded had managed to crawl away. The town guard had made short work of it all. The laws against street-brawling and noisy assemblies were over-severe just now; it was best to hide a wound and go nurse it quietly at home. Fortunately the fog favored the disturbers of the peace. Gradually they all contrived to sneak away, later on in the night to sally forth again for watchnight revelries, looking for all the world as if nothing had happened.

"Tumult? Papist-baiting? Was there really any Papist-baiting this night? Ah, these foreign adventurers do fill our peaceful city with their noise!"

In the Dam Straat the fog and the darkness reigned unchallenged. The second torch lay extinguished on the ground, trampled out under the heel of a heavy boot. And in the darkness three men were busy readjusting their mantles and trying to regain possession of their hats.

"A very unprofitable entertainment," growled Socrates.

"Total darkness, not a soul in sight and cold fit to chill the inner chambers of ——," assented Pythagoras.

"And no chance of adding anything to the stock of three guilders which must suffice us for tonight," concluded Diogenes airily.

He was carefully wiping the shining blade of Bucephalus with the corner of Pythagoras's mantle.

"*Verrek jezelf!* And what the devil?" queried the latter in a high falsetto.

"My mantle is almost new," said Diogenes reproachfully. "Thou wouldst not have me soil it so soon?"

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"I have a hole in my head fit to bury those three guilders in," murmured Socrates with a sigh.

"And I a blow in the stomach which has chilled me to the marrow," sighed Pythagoras.

"And I a bruised shoulder," laughed Diogenes, "which hath engendered an unquenchable thirst."

"I wouldn't sell my thirst for any money this night," assented Pythagoras.

"To 'The Lame Cow' then, O Pythagoras, and I'll toss thee for the first drink of hot ale."

"Ugh! But my head feels mightily hot and thick," said Socrates somewhat huskily.

"Surely thou canst walk as far as 'The Lame Cow,'" queried Pythagoras anxiously.

"I doubt me!" sighed the other.

"Ale!" whispered Diogenes encouragingly. "Warm, sparkling, spicy ale!"

"Hm! Hm!" assented the wounded man feebly.

"Easy! Easy, my friend," said Diogenes, for his brother philosopher had fallen heavily against him.

"What are we to do?" moaned Pythagoras in his dulcet tones. "I have a thirst . . . and we can not leave this irresponsible fool to faint here in the fog."

"Hoist him up by the seat of his breeches, then, on to my back," retorted Diogenes lightly. "'The Lame Cow' is not far and I too have a thirst."

Socrates would have protested. He did not relish the idea of being tossed about like a bale of goods on his friend's back. But he could protest only by word of mouth, to which the others paid no heed, and when he tried to struggle he rolled, dizzy and faint, almost to the ground.

"There's nothing for it," piped Pythagoras with consummate philosophy. "I couldn't carry him if I tried."

Diogenes bent his broad back and rested his hands on his thighs, getting as firm a hold of the slippery ground as he could. Socrates for the moment was like a helpless log. There was much groping about in the darkness, a good deal of groaning and a vast amount of swearing. Socrates had fortunately not fainted, and after a little while was able to settle down astride on his friend's back, his arms around the latter's neck, Pythagoras giving vigorous pushes from the rear.

When Diogenes, firmly grasping the wounded man's legs, was at last able to straighten himself out again and did so to the accompaniment of a mighty groan and still more mighty oath, he found himself confronted by two lanthorns which were held up within a few inches of his nose.

"*Dondersteen!*" he ejaculated loudly, and nearly dropped his half conscious and swaying burden on the ground.

"WHAT is it now, Jakob?" queried a woman's voice peremptorily.

"I can not see clearly, lady," replied one of the lanthorn bearers. "Two men, I think."

"Then do thy thoughts proclaim thee a liar, friend," said Diogenes lightly. "There are three men here at this lady's service, though one is sick, the other fat, and the third a mere beast of burden."

"Let me see them, Jakob," ordered the woman. "I believe they are the same three men who——"

The lanthorn bearers made way for the lady, still holding the lanthorns up so that the light fell fully on the quaint spectacle presented by the three philosophers. There was Socrates perched up aloft, his bird-like face smeared with blood, his eyes rolling in their effort to keep open, his thin back bent nearly double, so that indeed he looked like a huge plucked crow the worse for a fight and perched on an eminence where he felt none too secure.

And below him was his friend, with broad shoulders bending under the burden, his plumed hat shading his brow, his merry, twinkling eyes fixed a little suspiciously on the four figures that loomed out of the fog in front of him, his mocking lips ready framed for a smile or an oath, his hands which supported the legs of poor wounded Socrates struggling visibly toward the hilt of his sword.

And peeping around from behind him was the short, rotund form of Pythagoras, crowned with a tall sugar-loaf hat, which obviously had never belonged to him until now, for it perched somewhat insecurely above his flat, round face, with the small upturned nose slightly tinged with pink and the tiny eyes round and bright as new crowns.

Undoubtedly the sight was ludicrous in the extreme. The woman who looked on it now burst into a merry peal of laughter.

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"Oh, Maria! Dost see them?" she said, turning to her companion, an elderly woman in sober black gown and coif of tinsel lace. "Hast ever seen anything so quaint?"

She herself was young, and in the soft light of the two lanthorns appeared to the three philosophers to be more than passing fair.

"Socrates, thou malapert," said Diogenes sternly, "take my hat off my head at once and allow me to make obeisance to the lady, or I'll drop thee incontinently on thy back."

Then, as Socrates half mechanically lifted the plumed hat from his friend's head, the latter bowed as well as he could under the circumstances and said gallantly:

"Thy servants, lady, and eternally grateful are we for a sight of thee at this moment when the world appeared peculiarly fog-ridden and unpleasant. Having been the fortunate cause of thy merriment, might we now crave thy permission to continue our way? The weight of my friend up there is greater than his importance warrants, and I don't want to drop him ere we reach a haven of refuge, where our priceless thirst will soon, I hope, find solace."

The delicate face of the young girl had suddenly become more grave.

"Your pardon, gentle sirs," she said with a pretty mixture of imperiousness and humility. "My levity was indeed misplaced. I know ye now for the same three brave fellows who were fighting a few moments ago against overwhelming odds, in order to protect a woman against a rowdy crowd. Oh, it was a valorous deed!

"My men and I were on our way to watch-night service and saw it all from a distance. We dared not come nigh, the rabble looked so threatening. All I could do was to shout for help and summon the town guard to your aid.

"It was you, was it not?" she added, regarding with great, wondering blue eyes the three curious figures who stood somewhat sheepishly before her.

"Yes, fair lady," piped Pythagoras in his neatest falsetto. "We were the three men who in the face of well nigh overwhelming odds did save a defenseless woman from the insolent rabble. My friend who is perched up there was severely wounded in the fray. I myself received so violent a blow in the stomach that a raging thirst has since taken possession of my throat and——"

He stopped abruptly and murmured a comprehensive oath. He had just received a violent kick in the shins from Diogenes.

"What the ——," he muttered.

But Diogenes paid no heed to him. Looking on the dainty picture before him with eyes that twinkled whilst they did not attempt to conceal the admiration which he felt, he said with elaborate gallantry, which his position under the burden of Socrates's swaying figure rendered inexpressibly droll:

"For the help rendered to us all at the moment of distress, deign to accept, Mejuffrouw, our humble thanks. For the rest, believe me, our deed was not one of valor, and such as it was it is wholly unworthy of the praise which thou dost deign to bestow upon it.

"I would tell thee more," he added whimsically, "only that my friend behind me is violently kicking the calves of my legs, which renders the elegant flow of language well nigh impossible. I stopped him from talking just now. He retaliates; it is but just."

"Gentle sir," said the girl, who obviously had much ado to preserve her gravity, "your modesty doth but equal your gallantry. This do I see quite plainly. But if at any time I can do aught to express in a more practical manner the real admiration which I feel for your worth, I pray you command me. Alas! Brave men are few these days! But my father's name is known throughout Holland; his wealth and influence are vast. I pray you tell me, can I do aught for you now?"

SHE spoke so artlessly and at the same time with such gentle dignity, that it was small wonder that for the nonce even the most talkative of all philosophers was dumb, and that his habitual mocking banter failed to cross his lips. The girl was young and exquisitely pretty. The stiff, unwieldy costume of the time failed to conceal altogether the graceful slenderness of her figure, just as the prim coif of gold and silver tissue failed to hold the unruly brown curls in bondage. The light from the lanthorns fell full on her face, revealing around her throat beneath her fur-lined cloak a glimmer of starched linen and lace, whilst gems in her ears and on her breast lent her an air of elegance and even of splendor.

Pythagoras in the rear heaved a deep

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sigh. He drew in his breath preparatory to a long and comprehensive oration.

"Can I do aught for you?" the lady had said; a lady who was rich and influential and willing! Ye thunders and lightnings! When but three guilders stood between three philosophers and absolute penury! Ye hails and storms! What an opportunity! He would have approached the lady, only Diogenes's wide shoulders blocked him out from her view.

"Can I do aught for thee now?" she reiterated gently.

"Raise thy hand to my lips," said Diogenes lightly. "Momentarily I have not the use of mine own."

She hesitated, but only for a brief moment; then did just what he asked. She held her hand to his lips—mayhap one second longer than was absolutely necessary—and her eyes, large, deep and shy, looked for that one second into a pair of merry, mocking ones. Then she sighed, whether with satisfaction or embarrassment I could not undertake to say, and asked with a gracious smile—

"And what is thy next wish, gentle sir?"

"Thy leave to continue our journey to 'The Lame Cow,'" he replied airily. "My friend up there is getting outrageously heavy."

She drew back, visibly surprised and hurt.

"I do not detain ye," she said curtly, and without another word she turned to her lanthorn bearers and ordered them to precede her. She also called to her duenna to follow, but she did not bestow another look on the three men, nor did she acknowledge the respectful farewell which came from the lips of the beast of burden.

The next moment she had already crossed the road toward the cathedral, and she and her escort were swallowed up by the fog.

"Well, of all the —— idiots that ever ——" swore Pythagoras in his shrillest tones.

Even Socrates pulled himself together in order to declare emphatically that Diogenes was a confounded fool.

"'I pray thee, raise thy hand to my lips,'" mimicked Pythagoras mockingly. "*Verrek jezelf!*" he muttered under his breath.

"If thou dost not hold thy tongue, O wise Pythagoras," retorted Diogenes with all his wonted merriment, "I'll even have to drop Socrates on the top of thee in order to break thy head."

"But 'tis a fortune—the promise of a fortune which thou letst slip so stupidly."

"There is a certain wisdom even in stupidity sometimes, Pythagoras, as thou wilt discover one day when thy nose is less red and thy figure less fat. Remember that I have three guilders in my pocket and that our thirst hath not grown less. Follow me now; we've talked enough for tonight."

And he started walking down the street with long and rapid strides, Socrates up aloft swaying about like a dummy figure in carnival time and Pythagoras, still muttering a series of diversified oaths, bringing up the rear.

CHAPTER IV

WATCH NIGHT

AND am I not proved fully justified in my statement that, but for many seemingly paltry circumstances, the further events which I am about to place on record and which have been of paramount importance to the history of no less than two great and worthy families, never would have shaped themselves as they did?

For, but for the presence of three philosophers on the Grootemarkt on the eve of the New Year, and their subsequent interference in the fray outside the Papist convent door in the Dam Straat, who could assert that Jongejuffrouw Beresteyn would ever have condescended to exchange half a dozen words with three out-at-elbows, homeless, shiftless foreign adventurers who happened to have drifted into Haarlem—the Lord only knew for what purpose and with what hopes?

Jongejuffrouw Beresteyn had been well and rigidly brought up. She was well educated and possessed more knowledge than most young girls of her social standing or of her age. Mynheer Beresteyn, her father, was a gentleman of vast consideration in Haarlem, and as his two children had been motherless as soon as the younger one saw the light of day, he had been doubly careful in his endeavors that his daughter should in no way lack tender supervision.

Thus she had been taught early in life to keep herself aloof from all persons save those approved of by her father or her brother—a young man of sound understanding, some half dozen years older than

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herself. As for the strangers who for purposes of commerce or other less avowable motives filled the town of Haarlem with their foreign ways—which oft were immoral and seldom sedate—she had been strictly taught to hold these in abhorrence and never to approach such men either with word or gesture.

Was it likely then that she ever would have spoken to three thriftless knaves, and this at a late hour of the night, but for the fact that she had witnessed their valor from a distance, and with queenly condescension hoped to reward them with a gracious word?

The kiss imprinted upon her hand by respectful if somewhat bantering lips had greatly pleased her. Such, she imagined, would be the homage of a vassal proud to have attracted the notice of his lady paramount. The curtly expressed desire to quit her presence in order to repair to a hostelry had roused her indignation and her contempt.

She was angered beyond what the circumstance warranted, and whilst the minister preached an admirable and learned watch-night sermon, she felt her attention drifting away from the discourse and the solemnity of the occasion, whilst her wrath against a most unworthy object was taking the place of more pious and charitable feelings.

The preacher had taken for his text the sublime words from the New Testament, "The greatest of these is charity." He thought that the first day of the New Year was a splendid opportunity for the good inhabitants of Haarlem to cast off all gossiping and backbiting ways and to live from this day forth in greater amity and benevolence with one another.

"Love thy neighbor as thyself!" he adjured passionately, and the burghers with their vrouws in their Sunday best were smitten with remorse for past scandal-mongering and vowed that in the future they would live in perfect accord and good will.

Jongejuffrouw Beresteyn, too, thought of all her friends and acquaintances with the kindliest of feelings. She had not a harsh thought for any one in her heart—not for any one at any rate who was good and deserving. . . .

As for that knavish malapert with the merry, twinkling eyes and the mocking smile, surely God would not desire her to feel charitable toward him. A more ungrateful, more impertinent wretch she had never met. It was quite consoling to think of all that Mynheer Beresteyn's influence could have done for those three ragamuffins, and how in the near future they must all suffer abominable discomfort, mayhap with shortage of food and drink, or absence of shelter, when no doubt one of them at least would remember with contrition the magnanimous offer of help made to him by gracious lips which he had so insolently refused.

So absorbed was Jongejuffrouw Beresteyn in these thoughts that she never even noticed that the watch-night service was over and the minister already filing out with the clerk. The general exodus around her recalled her to herself and also to a sense of contrition for the absent way in which she had assisted at this solemn service.

She whispered to Maria to wait for her outside the church with the men.

"I must yet pray for a little while alone," she said. "I will join you at the north door in a quarter of an hour."

And she fell on her knees, and was soon absorbed in prayer.

Maria found the two serving-men in the crowd and transmitted to them her mistress's orders. The cathedral had been very full for the service and the worshipers took a long time filing out. They lingered about in the aisles, exchanging bits of city gossip and wishing one another a happy New Year.

THE verger had much ado to drive the goodly people out of the edifice. No sooner had he persuaded one group of chatterers to continue their conversation on the Grootemarkt outside than another batch seemed to loom out of the shadows, equally determined to conclude its gossip here in the warmth before sallying forth once more into the foggy midnight air.

"I must close the cathedral for the night," the worthy man repeated piteously. "Do you think that I don't want to get home and eat my watch-night supper at a reasonable hour? Move on there, my masters, move out please! My orders are to have the church closed before one o'clock."

He came on a group of men who sat together in the shadow of a heavy pillar close behind the pulpit.

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"Now then, mynheers," he said, "'tis closing time."

But those that were there made no sign to obey.

"All right, Perk," said one of them in a whisper. "We are not going just yet."

"Aye, but ye are," retorted the verger gruffly, for he was cross now and wanting his supper. "What should I allow ye to stay for?"

"For the memory of Jan!" was the whispered response.

The verger's manner changed in an instant. The few words evidently bore some portentous meaning of which he held the key—and I doubt not but that the key was made of silver.

"All right, mynheers," he said softly. "The church will be clear in a few minutes now."

"Go 'round, Perk," said he who had first spoken, "and let us know when all is safe."

The verger touched his forelock and silently departed. Those that were there in the shadow by the great pillar remained in silence awaiting his return. The congregation was really dispersing now. The patter of leather shoes on the flagstones of the floor became gradually more faint; then it died out altogether. That portion of the Groote Kerk where is situate the magnificent carved pulpit was already quite dark and wholly deserted save for that group of silent, waiting figures that looked like shadows within the shadows.

Anon the verger returned. He had been absent only a few minutes.

"Quite safe now, mynheer," he said. "The last of them has just gone through the main door. I have locked all the doors save the west. If you want anything you will find me there. I can leave this one light for you; the others I must put out."

"Put them out, Perk, by all means," was the ready response. "We can find our way about in the dark."

The verger left them undisturbed. His shuffling steps were heard gliding along the flagstones until their murmur died away in the vastness of the sacred edifice.

The group of them who sat behind the pulpit, against the heavy pillar, now drew their rush chairs closer to one another. There were six of them altogether. The light from the lamp above illumined their faces, which were stern-looking, dark and of set determination. All six of them were young—only one among them might have been more than thirty years of age. That a great purpose brought them here tonight was obvious from their attitude, the low murmur of their voices, that air of mystery which hung around them, fostered by the dark cloaks which they held closely wrapped around their shoulders and the shadows from the pillar which they sought.

One of them appeared to be the center of their interest—a man lean and pallid-looking, with hollow, purple-rimmed eyes that spoke of night vigils or mayhap of unavowed, consuming thoughts. The mouth was hard and thin, and a febrile excitement caused his lips to quiver and his hand to shake.

The others hung upon his words.

"Tell us some of your adventures, Stoutenburg!" said one of them eagerly.

Stoutenburg laughed harshly and mirthlessly.

"They would take years in telling," he said. "Mayhap one day I'll write them down. They would fill many a volume."

"Enough that you did contrive to escape," said another man, "and that you are back here amongst us once more."

"Yes! In order to avenge wrongs that are as countless by now as the grains of sand on the seashore," rejoined Stoutenburg earnestly.

"You know that you are not safe inside Holland," suggested he who had first spoken.

"Aye, my good Beresteyn, I know that well enough," said Stoutenburg with a long and bitter sigh. "Your own father would send me to the gallows if he had the chance, and you with me, mayhap, for consorting with me."

"My father owes his position, his wealth, the prosperity of his enterprise to the Stadtholder," said Beresteyn, speaking with as much bitterness as his friend. "He looked upon the last conspiracy against the life of the Prince of Orange as a crime blacker than the blackest sin that ever deserved hell. . . . If he thought that I—at the present moment——"

"Yes, I know. But he has not the power to make you false to me, has he, Nicolaes?" asked Stoutenburg anxiously. "You are still at one with us?"

"With you to the death!" replied Beresteyn fervently. "So are we all."

"Aye, that we are!" said the four others

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with one accord, whilst one of them added dryly—

"And determined not to fail like the last time by trusting those hirelings who will take your money and betray you for more."

"Last February we were beset with bunglers and self-seekers," said Stoutenburg. "My own brother Groeneveld was half-hearted in everything save the desire to make money. Saltius was a vindictive boor, van Dyk was a busybody, and Korenwinder a bloated fool. Well, they have paid their penalty. Heaven have their souls! But let us do the work ourselves this time."

"They say that the Stadtholder is sick unto death," said one of the men somberly. "Disease strikes with a surer hand sometimes than doth the poniard of an enemy."

"Bah! I have no time to waste waiting for his death," retorted Stoutenburg roughly. "There is an opportunity closer at hand and more swift than the weary watching for the slow ravages of disease. The Stadtholder comes to Amsterdam next week. The burghers of his beloved city have begged of him to be present at the consecration of the Wester Kerk, built by Mynheer van Keyser, as well as at the opening of the East India Company's new hall. He plays up for popularity just now. The festivals in connection with the double event at Amsterdam have tempted him to undertake the long journey from the frontier, despite his failing health. His visit to this part of the country is a golden opportunity which I do not intend to miss."

"You will find it very difficult to get near the Stadtholder on such an occasion," remarked Beresteyn. "He no longer drives about unattended as he used to do."

"ALL the escort in the world will not save him from my revenge," said Stoutenburg firmly. "Our position now is stronger than it has ever been. I have adherents in every city of Holland and of Zealand; aye, and in the south too, as far as Breda, and in the east as far as Arnhem. I tell you, friends, that I have spread a net over this country out of which Maurice of Orange can not escape. My organization, too, is better than it was. I have spies within the camp at Sprang, a knot of determined men all along the line between Breda and Amsterdam, at Gonda, at Delft—especially at Delft."

"Why specially there?" asked Beresteyn.

"Because I have it in my mind that mayhap we need not take the risks of accomplishing our *coup* in Amsterdam itself. As you say, it might be very difficult and very dangerous to get at the Stadtholder on a public occasion. But Delft is on the way. Maurice of Orange is certain to halt at Delft, if only in order to make a pilgrimage to the spot where his father was murdered.

"He will, I am sure, sleep more than one night at the Prinsenhof. And from Delft the way leads northward past Ryswyk—Ryswyk, close to which I have had my headquarters these weeks past; Ryswyk, my friends!" he continued speaking very rapidly, almost incoherently, in his excitement. "Where I have arms and ammunition! Ryswyk, which is the rallying point for all my friends. The mill!—you remember?—close to the wooden bridge which spans the Schie. I have enough gunpowder stored at that mill to blow up twenty wooden bridges—and the Stadtholder with his escort must cross the wooden bridge which spans the Schie not far from the mill where I have my headquarters. I have it all in my mind already.

"I only wait to hear news of the actual day when the Stadtholder leaves his camp. I can tell you more tomorrow, but in the meanwhile I want to know if there are a few men about here on whom I can rely at a moment's notice; whom I can use as spies or messengers, or even to lend me a hand at Ryswyk in case of need. Thirty or forty would be sufficient, if they are good fighting-men. I said something about this in my message to you all."

"And I, for one, acted on your suggestion at once," said one of the others. "I have recruited ten stout fellows—Germans and Swiss who know not a word of our language. I pay them well and they ask no questions. They will fight for you, spy for you, run for you, do anything you choose and can betray nothing, since they know nothing. They are at your disposal at any moment."

"That is good, and I thank you, my dear Heemskerk."

"I have half a dozen peasants on my own estate on whom I can rely," said another of Stoutenburg's friends. "They are good fighters, hard-headed and ready to go through fire and water for me. They are as safe as foreign mercenaries, for they will do anything I tell them and will do it without asking the reason why."

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"I have another eight or ten foreigners to offer you," said a third. "They come from a part of Britain called Scotland, so I understand. I picked them up a week ago when they landed at Scheveningen and engaged them in my service then and there."

"And I can lay my hand at any moment on a dozen or so young apprentices in my father's factory," added a fourth. "They are always ready for a frolic or a fight, and ready to follow me to —— if need be."

"You see that you can easily count on three dozen men," concluded Beresteyn.

"Three dozen men ready to hand," said Stoutenburg. "For our present needs they should indeed suffice. Knowing that I can reckon on them, I can strike the decisive blow when and how I think it best. It is the blow that counts," he continued between set teeth. "After that everything is easy enough. The waverers hang back until success is assured.

"But our secret adherents in Holland can be counted by the score, in Zealand and Utrecht by the hundred. When Maurice of Orange has paid with his own blood the penalty which his crimes have incurred, when I can proclaim myself over his dead body Stadtholder of the Northern Provinces, Captain and Admiral-General of the State, thousands will rally 'round us and flock to our banner.

"Thousands feel as we do, think as we do and know what we know—that John of Barneveld will not rest in his grave till I, his last surviving son, have avenged him. Who made this Republic what she is? My father. Who gave the Stadtholder the might which he possesses? My father. My father, whose name was revered and honored throughout the length and breadth of Europe and whom an ingrate's hand hath branded with the mark of traitor.

"The Stadtholder brought my father to the scaffold, heaping upon him accusations of treachery which he himself must have known were groundless. When the Stadtholder sent John of Barneveld to the scaffold he committed a crime which can only be atoned for by his own blood. Last year we failed. The mercenaries whom we employed betrayed us. My brother, our friends, went the way my father led; victims all of them of the rapacious ambition, the vengeful spite of the Stadtholder.

"But I escaped as by a miracle! A miracle I say it was, my friends; a miracle wrought by the God of vengeance who hath said, 'I will repay!' He hath also said that whosoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed. I am the instrument of his vengeance. Vengeance is mine! 'Tis I who will repay!"

He had never raised his voice during this long peroration, but his diction had been none the less impressive because it was spoken under his breath. The others had listened in silence, awed no doubt by the bitter flood of hate which coursed through every vein of this man's body and poured in profusion from his lips. The death of father and brother and of many friends, countless wrongs, years of misery, loss of caste, of money and of home, had numbed him against every feeling save that of revenge.

"This time I'll let no man do the work for me," he said after a moment's silence. "If you will all stand by me, I will smite the Stadtholder with mine own hand."

He had raised his voice just enough to wake the echo that slept in the deserted edifice.

"Hush!" whispered one of his friends. "Hush, for Heaven's sake!"

"Bah! The church is empty," retorted Stoutenburg, "and the verger too far away to hear. I'll say it again, and proclaim it loudly now in this very church before the altar of God; I will kill the Stadtholder with mine own hand!"

"Silence, in the name of Heaven!"

More than one muffled voice had uttered the warning and Beresteyn's hand fell heavily on Stoutenburg's arm.

"Hush, I say!" he whispered hoarsely. "There's something moving there in the darkness."

"A rat, mayhap," quoth Stoutenburg lightly.

"No, no. . . Listen! . . . Some one moves. . . . Some one has been there . . . all along. . . ."

"A spy!" murmured many under their breath.

IN A MOMENT every man there had his hand on his sword; Stoutenburg and Beresteyn actually drew theirs. They did not speak to one another, for they had caught one another's swift glance and the glance had in it the forecast of a grim resolve.

Whoever it was who thus moved silently out of the shadows—spy or merely indiscreet listener—would pay with his life for

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the knowledge which he had obtained. These men here could no longer afford to take any risks. The words spoken by Stoutenburg and registered by them all could be made the stepping-stones to the scaffold if strange ears had caught their purport.

They meant death to some one, either to the speakers or to the eavesdropper; and six men were determined that it should be the eavesdropper who must pay for his presence here.

They forced their eyes to penetrate the dense gloom which surrounded them, and one and all held their breath, like furtive animals that await their prey. They stood there silent and rigid, a tense look on every face. The one light fixed in the pillar above them played weirdly on their starched ruffs, scarce whiter than the pallid hue of their cheeks.

Then suddenly a sound caught their ears, which caused each man to start and to look at his nearest companion with set, inquiring eyes. It was the sound of a woman's skirt swishing against the stonework of the floor. The seconds went by leaden-footed and full of portentous meaning. Each heart-beat beneath the vaulted roof of the cathedral tonight seemed like a knell from eternity.

How slow the darkness was in yielding up its secret!

At last, as the conspirators gazed, they saw the form of a woman emerging out of the shadows. At first they could see only her starched kerchief and a glimmer of jewels beneath her cloak. Then gradually the figure, ghostlike in this dim light, came more fully into view. The face of a woman, her lace coif, the gold embroidery of her stomacher, all became detached one by one; but only for a few seconds, for the woman was walking rapidly. Nor did she look to right or left, but glided along the floor like a vision, white, silent, swift, which might have been conjured up by a fevered brain.

"A ghost!" whispered one of the young men hoarsely.

"No. A woman," said another, and the words came like a hissing sound through his teeth.

Beresteyn and Stoutenburg said nothing for a while. They looked silently on one another, the same burning anxiety glowing in their eyes, the same glance of mute despair passing from one to the other.

"Gilda!" murmured Stoutenburg at last.

The swish of the woman's skirt had died away in the distance. Not one of the men had attempted to follow her or to intercept her passage.

Jongejuffrouw Beresteyn, no spy of course; just a chance eavesdropper, but possessed nevertheless now of a secret which meant death to them all!

"How much did she hear, think you?" asked Stoutenburg at last.

He had replaced his sword in his scabbard with a gesture that expressed his own sense of fatality. He could not use his sword against a woman, even had that woman not been Gilda Beresteyn.

"She can not have heard much," said one of the others. "We spoke in whispers."

"If she had heard anything she would have known that only the west door was to remain open. Yet she has made straight for the north portal," suggested another.

"If she did not hear the verger speaking she could not have heard what we said," argued a third somewhat lamely.

Every one of them had some suggestion to put forward, some surmise to express, some hope to urge. Only Beresteyn said nothing. He had stood by, fierce and silent, ever since he had first recognized his sister. Beneath his lowering brows the resolve had not died out of his eyes, and he still held his sword unsheathed in his hand.

Stoutenburg now appealed directly to him.

"What do you think of it, Beresteyn?" he asked.

"I think that my sister did hear something of our conversation," he answered quietly.

"Great Heaven!" ejaculated the others.

"But," added Beresteyn slowly, "I pledge you mine oath that she will not betray us."

"How will you make sure of that?" retorted Stoutenburg, not without a sneer.

"That is mine affair."

"And ours too. We can do nothing, decide on nothing until we are sure."

"Then I pray you wait for me here," concluded Beresteyn. "I will bring you a surety before we part this night."

"Let me go and speak to her," urged Stoutenburg.

"No, no. 'Tis best that I should go."

Stoutenburg made a movement as if he would detain him; then seemed to think better of it, and finally let him go.

Beresteyn did not wait for further com-

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ment from his friends, but quickly turned on his heel. The next moment he was speeding away across the vast edifice and his tall figure was soon swallowed up by the gloom.

CHAPTER V

BROTHER AND SISTER

THE verger on guard at the west door had quietly dropped to sleep. He did not wake apparently when Jongejuffrouw Beresteyn slipped past him and out through the door.

Beresteyn followed close on his sister's heels. He touched her shoulder just as she stood outside the portal, wrapping her fur cloak more snugly over her shoulders and looking around her, anxious to find her servants.

"'Tis late for you to be out this night, Gilda," he said, "and alone."

"I am alone only for the moment," she replied quietly. "Maria and Jakob and Piet are waiting for me at the north door. I did not know it would be closed."

"But why are you so late?"

"I stayed in church after the service."

"But why?" he insisted more impatiently.

"I could not pray during service," she said. "My thoughts wandered. I wanted to be alone for a few moments with God."

"Did you not know then that you were not alone?"

"No. Not at first."

"But—afterward?"

"Your voice, Nicolaes, struck on my ear. I did not want to hear. I wanted to pray."

"Yet you listened?"

"No. I did not wish to listen."

"But you heard?"

She gave no actual reply, but he could see her profile, straight and white, the curved lips firmly pressed together, the brow slightly puckered, and from the expression of her face and of her whole attitude he knew that she had heard.

He drew in his breath, like one who has received a blow and has not yet realized how deeply it would hurt. His right hand, which was resting on his hip, tore at the cloth of his doublet, else mayhap it would already have wandered to the hilt of his sword.

He had expected it, of course. Even when he saw Gilda gliding out of the shadows with that awed, tense expression on her face, he knew that she must have heard . . . something at least—something that had horrified her to the soul.

But now, of course, there was no longer any room for doubt. She had heard everything, and the question was, what that knowledge, lodged in her brain, might mean to him and to his friends.

Just for a moment the frozen, misty atmosphere took on a reddish hue. His tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth. A cold sweat broke out upon his forehead.

He looked around him furtively, fearfully, wondering whence came that hideous, insinuating whisper which was freezing the marrow in his bones. No doubt that, had she spoken then, had she reproached or adjured, he would have found it impossible to regain mastery over himself. But she looked so unimpassioned, so still, so detached that self-control came back to him, and for the moment she was safe.

"Will you tell me what you did hear?" he asked after a while, with seeming calm, though he felt as if his words must choke him, and her answer strike him dead.

"I heard," she said speaking very slowly and very quietly, "that the Lord of Stoutenburg has returned and is trying to drag you and others into iniquity to further his own ambitious schemes."

"You wrong him there, Gilda. The Lord of Stoutenburg has certain wrongs to avenge which cry aloud to heaven."

"We will not argue about that, Nicolaes," she said coldly. "Murder is hideous, call it what you will. The brand of Cain doth defame a man and carries its curse with it. No man can justify so dastardly a crime. 'Tis sophistry to suggest it."

"Then in sending Barneveld to the scaffold did the Prince of Orange call that curse upon himself, a curse which—please the God of vengeance!—will come home to him now at last."

"'Tis not for you, Nicolaes, to condemn him, who has heaped favors, kindness, bounties upon our father and upon us. 'Tis not for you, the Stadtholder's debtor for everything you are, for everything that you possess, 'tis not for you to avenge Barneveld's wrongs."

"'Tis not for you, my sister," he retorted hotly, "to preach to me, your elder brother. I alone am responsible for mine actions, and have no account to give to any one."

"You owe an account of your actions to

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your father and to me, Nicolaes, since your dishonor will fall upon us too."

"Take care, Gilda, take care!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "You speak of things which are beyond your ken, but in speaking them you presume on my forbearance—and on your sex."

"There is no one in sight," she said calmly. "You may strike me without fear. One crime more or less on your conscience will soon cease to trouble you."

"Gilda!" he cried, with sudden passionate reproach.

AT THIS involuntary cry—in which the expression of latent affection for her struggled with that of his rage and of his burning anxiety—all her own tender feelings for him, her womanliness, her motherly instincts, were reawakened in an instant. They had been dormant only for a while, because of her horror of what she had heard.

And that horror of a monstrous deed, that sense of shame that he, her brother, should be so ready to acquiesce in a crime, had momentarily silenced the call of sisterly love. But this love, once reawakened, was strong enough to do battle in her heart on his behalf. The tense rigidity of her attitude relaxed, her mouth softened, her eyes filled with tears. The next moment she had turned fully to him and was looking pleadingly into his face.

"Little brother," she murmured gently, "tell me that it is not true. That it was all a hideous dream."

He looked down at her for a moment. It pleased him to think that her affection for him was still there, that at any rate his personal safety might prove a potent argument against the slightest thought of indiscretion on her part. She tried to read his thoughts, but everything was dark around them both. The outline of his brow and mouth alone stood clearly out from the gloom. The expression of his eyes she could not fathom.

But, womanlike, she was ready to believe that he would relent. It is so difficult for a woman to imagine that one whom she loves is really prone to evil. She loved this brother dearly and did not grasp the fact that he had reached a point in his life when a woman's pleadings had not the power to turn him from his purpose. She did not know how deeply he had plunged into the slough of conspiracy, and that the excitement of it had fired his blood to the exclusion of righteousness and of loyalty.

She hoped, in the simplicity of her heart, that he was only misled, that evil counsels had only temporarily prevailed. Like a true woman, she still saw the child in this brother who had grown to manhood by her side.

Therefore she appealed and she pleaded, she murmured tender words and made fond suggestions, all the while that his heart was hard to everything except to the one purpose which she was trying to thwart.

Not unkindly but quite firmly he detached her clinging arms from around his neck.

"Let us call it a dream, little sister," he said firmly, "and do you try and forget it."

"That I can not, Nicolaes," she replied, "unless you will promise me——"

"To betray my friends?" he sneered.

"I would not ask you to do that. But you can draw back—it is not too late. For our father's sake, and for mine, Nicolaes!" she pleaded once more earnestly. "Oh think, little brother, think! It can not be that you could countenance such a hideous crime, you who were always so loyal and so brave! I remember when you were quite a tiny boy what contempt you had for little Jakob Steyn because he told lies, and how you thrashed Frans van Overstein because he ill-treated a dog. . . .

"Little brother, when our father was ruined, penniless after that awful siege of Haarlem, which is still a hideous memory to him, the Prince of Orange helped him with friendship and money to reëstablish his commerce. He stood by him loyally, constantly, until more prosperous days dawned upon our house. Little brother, you have oft heard our father tell the tale. Think—oh, think of the blow you would be dealing him if you lent a hand to conspiracy against the Prince. Little brother, for our father's sake, for mine, do not let yourself be dragged into the toils of that treacherous Stoutenburg."

"You call him treacherous now, but you loved him once."

"It is because I loved him once," she rejoined earnestly, "that I call him treacherous now."

He made no comment on this, for he knew in his heart of hearts that what she said was true. He knew nothing, of course, of the events of that night in the early

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Spring of the year when Gilda had sheltered and comforted the man who had so basely betrayed her, who—but for her ministration then, when exhausted and half starved he sought shelter under her roof, in her very room—would not have lived to do this further plotting and this further infamy, nor yet to drag her brother down with him into the abyss of his own disgrace.

Of this nocturnal visit Gilda had never spoken to any one, not even to Nicolaes, who, she knew, was Stoutenburg's friend; least of all to her father, whose wrath would have fallen heavily on her had he known that she had harbored a traitor in his house.

"Stoutenburg lied to me, Nicolaes," she now said, seeing that still her brother remained silent and morose. "He lied to me when he stole my love, only to cast it away from him as soon as ambition called him from my side. And as he lied then, so will he lie to you, little brother. He will steal your allegiance, use you for his own ends and cast you ruthlessly from him if he finds you no longer useful.

"Yes, I did love him once," she continued earnestly. "When he thought of staining his hands with murder my love finally turned to contempt. This new infamy which he plots hath filled the measure of my hate. Oh, turn from him, little brother, I do entreat you with my whole soul. He has been false to his God, false to his Prince, false to me! He will be false to you!"

"It is too late, Gilda," he retorted somberly, "even if I were so minded—which, please God! I am not."

"It is never too late to draw back from such an abyss of shame."

"BE SILENT, girl," he said more roughly, angered that he was making no headway against her obstinacy. "*Godverdomme!* But I am a fool indeed to stand and parley here with you, when grave affairs wait upon my time. You talk at random and of things you do not understand. I had no mind to argue this matter out with you."

"I do not detain you, Nicolaes," she said simply, with a sigh of bitter disappointment. "If you will but call Maria and the men who wait at the north door, I can easily relieve you of my presence."

"Yes, and you can go home to your pots and pans, to your sewing and your linen chest, and remember to hold your tongue, as a woman should do, for if you breathe of what you have heard, if you betray Stoutenburg, who is my friend, it is me—your only brother—whom you will be sending to the scaffold."

"I would not betray you, Nicolaes," she said.

"Or any of my friends?"

"Or any of your friends."

"You swear it?" he urged.

"There is no need for an oath."

"Yes, there is a pressing need for an oath, Gilda," he retorted sternly. "My friends expect it of you, and you must pledge yourself to them, to forget all that you heard tonight and never to breathe of it to any living soul."

"I can not swear," she replied, "to forget that which my memory will retain in spite of my will; nor would I wish to forget, because I mean to exert all the power I possess to dissuade you from this abominable crime, and because I mean to pray to God with all my might that He may prevent the crime from being committed."

"You may pray as much as you like," he said roughly, "but I'll not have you breathe a word of it to any living soul."

"My father has the right to know of the disgrace that threatens him."

"You would not tell him?" he exclaimed hoarsely.

"Not unless——"

"Unless what?"

"I can not say. 'Tis all in God's hands and I do not know yet what my duty is. As you say, I am only a woman, and my place is with my pots and pans, my sewing and my spindle. I have no right to have thoughts of mine own. Perhaps you are right, and in that case my father must indeed be the one to act.

"But this I do swear to you, Nicolaes, that before you stain your hand with the blood of one who besides being your sovereign lord is your father's benefactor and friend, I will implore God above that my father and I may both die ere we see you and ourselves so disgraced."

Before he could detain her by word or gesture she had slipped past him and turned to walk quickly toward the façade of the cathedral. An outstanding piece of masonry soon hid her from his view.

For the moment he had thoughts of following her. Nicolaes Beresteyn was not a

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man who liked being thwarted, least of all by a woman, and there was a sense of insecurity for him in what she had said at the last. His life and that of his friends lay in the hands of that young girl who had spoken some very hard words to him just now.

He loved her as a brother should and would not for his very life have seen her in any danger, but he had all a man's desire for mastery and hatred of independence. She had angered and defied him, and yet remained in a sense his master.

He and his friends were dependent on her whim—he would not call it loyalty or sense of duty to be done—it was her whim that would hold the threads of a conspiracy which he firmly believed had the welfare of Holland and of religion for its object, and it was her whim that would hold the threat of the scaffold over himself and Stoutenburg and the others. The situation was intolerable.

He ground his heel upon the stone and muttered an oath under his breath. If only Gilda had been a man how simple would his course of action have been! A man can be coerced by physical means, but a woman! And that woman his own sister!

It was hard for Nicolaes Beresteyn to have to think the situation out calmly, dispassionately, to procrastinate, to let the matter rest, at any rate until the next day. But this he knew that he must do. He felt that he had exhausted all the arguments, all the reasonings that were consistent with his own pride. And how could he hope to coerce her into oaths or promises of submission here in the open street and with Maria and Jakob and Piet close by—eavesdropping mayhap?

Gilda was obstinate and had always been allowed more latitude in the way of thinking things out for herself than was good for any woman; but Nicolaes knew that she would not take any momentous step in a hurry. She would turn the whole of the circumstances over in her mind, and as she said, do some praying too. What she would do afterward he dared not even conjecture.

For the moment he was forced to leave her alone, and primarily he decided to let his friends know at once how the matter stood.

He found them waiting anxiously for his return. I doubt if they had spoken much during his absence. A chorus of laconic inquiry greeted him as soon as his firm step rang out upon the flagstones.

"Well?"

"She has heard everything," he said quietly, "but she will not betray us. To this I pledge ye my word."

CHAPTER VI

THE COUNSELS OF PRUDENCE

NEITHER Stoutenburg nor any of the others had made reply to Beresteyn's firmly spoken oath. They were hard-headed Dutchmen, every one of them; men of action rather than men of words. For good or ill, the rest of the world can judge them forever after by their deeds alone.

Therefore when the specter of betrayal and of subsequent death appeared so suddenly before them they neither murmured nor protested. They could not in reason blame Beresteyn for his sister's presence in the cathedral this night, nor yet that her thoughts and feelings in the matter of the enmity between the Stadtholder and the Barneveld family did not coincide with their own.

Silently they walked across the vast and lonely cathedral and filed one by one out of the western door where Perk still held watch. Stoutenburg, their leader, had his lodgings in a small house situated at the top of the Klein Hout Straat, close to the well known hostelry at the sign of The Lame Cow. This latter was a hostelry of unimpeachable repute; thither did the six friends decide to go ere finally going home for the night.

It had been decided between them some time ago that those who were able to do so would show themselves in public as much as possible during the next few days, so as to ward off any suspicion of intrigue which their frequent consorting in secluded places might otherwise have aroused.

Out in the open they thought it best to disperse, electing to walk away two and two rather than in a compact group which might call forth the close attention of the night-watchman.

Stoutenburg linked his arm in that or Beresteyn.

"Let the others go on ahead," he said confidentially. "You and I, friend, must understand one another ere we part for this night."

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Then, as Beresteyn made no immediate reply, he continued calmly—

"This will mean hanging for the lot of us this time, Nicolaes!"

"I pray to God——" exclaimed the other hoarsely.

"God will have naught to say in the matter, my friend," retorted Stoutenburg dryly. "'Tis only the Stadtholder who will have his say, and do you think that he is like to pardon——"

"Gilda will never——"

"Oh, yes, she will," broke in Stoutenburg firmly. "Be not deluded into thoughts of security. Gilda will think the whole of this matter over for four-and-twenty hours at the longest, after which, feeling herself in a quandary between her affection for you and her horror of me, she will think it her duty to tell your father all that she heard in the cathedral tonight."

"Even then," said Beresteyn hotly, "my father would not send his only son to the gallows."

"Do you care to take that risk?" was the other man's calm retort.

"What can I do?"

"You must act decisively and at once, my friend," said Stoutenburg dryly, "if you do not desire to see your friends marched off to torture and the scaffold with yourself following in their wake."

"But how? How?" exclaimed Beresteyn.

His was by far the weaker nature of the two—easily led, easily swayed by a will stronger than his own. Stoutenburg wielded vast influence over him; the plotter had drawn him into the net of his own ambitious schemes, and had by promises and cajolery won his entire allegiance. Now that destruction and death threatened Nicolaes through his own sister—whom he sincerely loved—he turned instinctively to Stoutenburg for help and for advice.

"It is quite simple," said the latter slowly. "Gilda must be temporarily made powerless to do us any harm."

"How?" reiterated Beresteyn helplessly.

"Surely you can think of some means yourself," retorted Stoutenburg somewhat impatiently. "Self-preservation is an efficient sharpener of wits, as a rule, and your own life is in the hands of a woman now, my friend."

"You seem to forget that that woman is my sister. How can I conspire to do her bodily harm?"

"Who spake of bodily harm, you simpleton?" quoth Stoutenburg with a harsh laugh. "'Tis you who seem to forget that if Gilda is your sister she is also the woman whom I love more than my life, more than my ambition, more even than my revenge."

HE PAUSED a moment; for, despite his usual self-control, his passion at this moment threatened to master him. His voice rose harsh and quivering, and was like to attract the notice of passers-by. After a moment or two he conquered his emotion and said more calmly:

"Friend, we must think of our country and of our faith. We must think of the success of our schemes; and, though Gilda be dear to us both—infinitely dear to me—she must not be allowed to interfere with the great object which we hope to attain. Think out a way, therefore, of placing her in such a position that she can not harm us. Have her conveyed to some place where she can be kept a prisoner for a few days until I have accomplished what I have set out to do."

Then, as Beresteyn said nothing, seeming to be absorbed in some new train of thought, Stoutenburg continued more persuasively:

"I would I could carry her away myself and hold her—a beloved prisoner—while others did my work for me! But that I can not do; for 'twere playing the part of a coward and I have sworn before the altar of God that I would kill the Stadtholder with mine own hand.

"Nor would I have the courage so to offend her; for let me tell you this, Nicolaes, that soaring even above my most ambitious dreams, is the hope that when these have been realized I may ask Gilda to share my triumph with me."

"Nor would I have the courage so to offend my sister—my father," said Beresteyn. "You speak of carrying her off and holding her a prisoner for eight days, perhaps, or even a fortnight. How can I, her own brother, do that? 'Tis an outrage she would never forgive. My father would curse me, disinherit me, turn me out of house and home——"

"And will he not curse you now, when he knows—when tomorrow, mayhap, Gilda will have told him that you, his son, have joined hands with the Lord of Stoutenburg in a conspiracy to murder the Prince of

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Orange? Will he not disinherit you then? Turn you out of house and home?"

"Hold on, for mercy's sake!" exclaimed Beresteyn, who, bewildered by the terrible alternative thus put ruthlessly before him, felt that he must collect his thoughts, and must, for the moment at any rate, put away from him the tempter who insinuated thoughts of cowardice into his brain.

"I'll say no more then," said Stoutenburg quietly. "Think it all over, Nicolaes. My life, your own, those of all our friends are entirely in your hands. The welfare of the State, the triumph of our faith, depend on the means which you will devise for silencing Gilda for a few brief days."

After which there was silence between the two men. Beresteyn walked along more rapidly, his fur-lined cloak wrapped closely around him, his arms folded tightly across his chest and his hands clenched underneath his cloak. Stoutenburg, on the other hand, was also willing to let the matter drop and to allow the subtle poison which he had instilled into his friend's mind to ferment and bring forth such thoughts as would suit his own plans.

He knew how to gage exactly the somewhat vacillating character of Nicolaes Beresteyn, and had carefully touched every string of that highly nervous organization till he left it quivering with horror at the present and deathly fear for the future.

Gilda was a terrible danger, of that there could be no doubt. Nicolaes had realized this to the full. The instinct of self-preservation was strong in him. He would think over Stoutenburg's bold suggestion and would find a way how to act on it. And at the bottom of his tortuous heart Stoutenburg already cherished the hope that this new complication which had dragged Gilda into the net of his own intrigues would also ultimately throw her, a willing victim, into his loving arms.

CHAPTER VII

THREE PHILOSOPHERS AND THEIR FRIENDS

THEREUPON Chance forged yet another link in the chain of a man's destiny.

I pray you follow me now to the *tapperij* of "The Lame Cow." I had not asked you to accompany me thither were it not for the fact that "The Lame Cow," situate in the Kleine Hout Straat not far from the cathedral, was a well ordered and highly respectable tavern, where indeed the sober merrymakers of Haarlem as well as the gay and gilded youth of the city were wont to seek both pleasure and solace.

You all know the house, with its flat façade of red brick, its small windows and tall, very tall gabled roof that ends in a point high up above the front door. The *tapperij* is on your left as you enter. It is wainscoted with oak which was already black with age in the year 1623. Above the wainscot the walls are whitewashed, and Mynheer Beek, the host of "The Lame Cow," who is a pious man, has hung the walls around with scriptural texts appropriate to his establishment, such as: "Eat, drink and be merry!" and "Drink thy wine with a merry heart!"

From which I hope that I have convinced you that "The Lame Cow" was an eminently orderly place of conviviality, where worthy burghers of Haarlem could drink ale and hot posset in the company of mevrouws their wives.

And it was to this highly praised and greatly respected establishment that three tired-out and very thirsty philosophers repaired this New Year's night, instead of attending the watch-night service at one of the churches.

Diogenes, feeling that three guilders still reposed safely in his wallet, declared his intention of continuing his career as a gentleman, and a gentleman, of course, could not resort to one of those low-class taverns which were usually good enough for foreign adventurers.

And thus did Fate have her will with him and bring him here this night.

MOREOVER, the tap room of "The Lame Cow" wore a very gay appearance always on New Year's night. It was noted for its *clientele* on that occasion, for the good Rhenish wine which it dispensed, and for the gay sight engendered by the Sunday gowns of the burghers and their ladies who came here after service for a glass of wine and multifarious relish.

As the night was fine, despite the hard frost, Mynheer Beek expected to be unusually busy. Already he had arranged on the polished tables the rows of pewter platters heaped up with delicacies which he knew

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would be in great request when the guests would begin to arrive—smoked sausage garnished with horseradish, roasted liver and slabs of cheese.

The serving-wenches, with the sleeves of their linen shifts tucked well up above their round red arms, their stolid faces streaming with perspiration, were busy polishing tables that already were overpolished and making pewter mugs to shine that already shone with a dazzling radiance.

For the nonce the place was still empty and the philosophers when they entered were able to select the table at which they wished to sit—one near the hearth, in which blazed gigantic logs, and before which they could stretch out their limbs with comfort.

At Diogenes' suggestion they all made hasty repairs to their disordered toilet and readjusted the set of their collars and cuffs with the help of the small mirror that hung close by against the wall.

Three strange forms, of a truth, that were thus mirrored in turns.

There was Socrates, with a hole in his head, now freshly bandaged with a bit of clean linen by the sympathetic hand of a serving-maid; his hooked nose neatly washed till it shone like the pewter handle of a knife, his pointed cranium but sparsely furnished with lanky black hair peeping out above the bandage like a yellow *wurzel* in wrappings of paper. His arms and legs were unusually long and unusually thin. He had long, lean hands and long and narrow feet, but his body was short and slightly bent forward as if under the weight of his head, which also was narrow and long.

His neck was like that of a stork that has been half plucked. It rose from out the center of his ruffled collar with a curious undulating movement, which suggested that he could turn it right around and look at the middle of his own back. He wore a brown doublet of duffel and brown trunks and hose, and boots that appeared to be too big even for his huge feet.

Beside him Pythagoras looked like the full stop in a semicolon, for he was but little over five feet in height and very fat. His doublet of thick green cloth had long ago burst its buttons across his protuberant chest. His face, which was round as a full moon, was highly colored even to the tip of his small, upturned nose. His forehead, crowned by a thick mass of red-brown hair which fell in heavy and lanky waves down to his eyebrows, was always wet and shiny.

He had a habit of standing with legs wide apart, his abdomen thrust forward and his small, pudgy hands resting upon it. His eyes were very small and blinked incessantly. Below his double chin he wore a huge bow of starched white linen, which at this moment was sadly crumpled and stained, and his collar, which also had seen more prosperous days, was held together by a piece of string.

Like his friend Socrates, he wore trunk and hose of worsted, and high leather boots which reached well above the knee and looked as if they had been intended for a much taller person. The hat with the tall sugarloaf crown which he had picked up after the fray in the Dam Straat was much too small for his big round head. He tried before the mirror to adjust it at a becoming angle.

In strange contrast to these two worthies was their friend whom they called Diogenes. He himself, had you questioned him ever so closely, could not have told you from what ancestry or what unknown parent had come to him that air of swagger and of assurance which his avowed penury had never the power to subdue. Tall above the average, powerfully built and solidly planted on firm limbs, he looked what he easily might have been, a gentleman to the last inch of him.

The brow was fine and broad, the nose sensitive and well shaped, the mouth a perfect expression of gentle irony. The soft, brown hair, abundant and unruly, lent perhaps a certain air of untamed wildness to the face, whilst the upturned mustache and the tiny tuft below the under lip accentuated the look of devil-may-care independence which was the chief characteristic of the mouth.

But the eyes were the most remarkable feature of all. They shone with an unconquerable merriment, they twinkled and sparkled, and smiled and mocked, they winked and they beckoned. They were eyes to which you were obliged to smile in response, eyes that made you laugh if you felt ever so sad, eyes that jested even before the mouth had spoken. The mouth itself was permanently curved into a smile.

Unlike his two companions, Diogenes was dressed not only with scrupulous care but with a show of elegance. His doublet, though well worn, was fashioned of fine

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black cloth. The slashed sleeves still showed the remnants of gold embroidery, whilst the lace of his plaited collar was of beautiful design.

HAVING completed their toilet, the three friends sat at their table and sipped their ale and wine in comparative silence for a time. Socrates, weary with his wound, soon fell asleep, with his arms stretched out before him and his head resting in the bend of his elbow. Pythagoras, too, nodded in his chair; but Diogenes remained wide awake. No doubt Mynheer Beek's wine gave him pleasing thoughts, for the merry look never fled from his eyes.

Half an hour later you would scarce have recognized the *tapperij* from its previous orderly silence, for at about one o'clock it began to fill very fast. Mynheer Beek's guests were arriving. It was still bitterly cold and they all came into the warm room clapping their hands together and stamping the frozen snow off their feet, loudly demanding hot ale or mulled wine, to be supplemented later on by more substantial fare.

The two serving-wenches were busier, hotter and more profusely streaming with moisture than they had been before. It was, "Käthi, here!" and, "Luise, why don't you hurry?" all over the *tapperij* now; and every moment the noise became louder and more cheery.

Every corner of the low, raftered room was filled to overflowing with chairs and tables. People sat everywhere where a perch was to be found—on the corners of the tables and on the window sill; and many sat on the floor who could not find room elsewhere. The women sat on the men's knees, and many of them had children in their arms as well. For, indeed, on watch night room had to be found for every one who wanted to come in; no one who wanted to drink and to make merry must be left to wander out in the cold.

A veritable Babel of tongues made the whitewashed walls echo from end to end, for Haarlem now was a mightily prosperous city, and there were a great many foreign traders inside her walls, some of whom had thought to make merry this night in the famed tap room of "The Lame Cow"—French merchants with their silks, English merchants with fine cloths and paper, the Jewish dealers from Frankfurt and Amsterdam, and the Walloon cattle drovers from Flanders.

Here and there the uniform of a member of one of the shooting-guilds struck a note of splendor among the drabs and russets of worsted doublets, and the brilliant crimson or purple sashes gleamed in the feeble light of the tallow candles which spluttered and flickered in their sconces.

Then amongst them all there were the foreign mercenaries from Italy or Brabant or Germany or from Heaven knows where, loud of speech, aggressive in appearance, carrying swords and wearing spurs, filling the place with their swagger and their ribaldry.

They had come to the Netherlands at the expiration of the truce with Spain, offering to sell their swords and their skins to the highest bidder. They seemed all to be friends and boon companions together, called each other queer, fantastic names and shouted their rough jests to one another across the width of the room. Homeless, shiftless, thriftless, they knew no other names save those which chance or the coarse buffoonery of their friends had endowed them with.

There was a man here tonight who was called Wryface and another who went by the name of Gutter Rat. Not one amongst them, mayhap, could have told you who his father was or who his mother, nor where he himself had first seen the light of day; but they all knew of one another's career, of one another's prowess in the field at Prague or Ghent, and they formed a band of brothers—offensive and defensive—which was the despair of the town guard whenever the law had to be enforced against any one of them.

It was at the hour when Mynheer Beek was beginning to hope that his guests would soon bethink themselves of returning home and leaving him to his own supper and bed, that a party of these worthies made noisy irruption into the room. They brought with them an atmosphere of boisterous gaiety, with their clanking spurs and swords, their loud verbiage and burly personality.

"*Hech da!*" yelled one of these in a stentorian voice. "Whom have we there, snug and cozy in the warmest corner of this hole, but our three well beloved philosophers. Diogenes, old compeer," he shouted still louder than before, "is there room in your tub for your friends?"

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"Plenty 'round this table, O noble Gutter Rat," shouted Diogenes in joyous response. "But let me give you warning that space as well as common funds are running short, and that every newcomer who wants to sit must stand the others a draft of ale apiece; that is the price of a corner of this bench on which ye may sit if ye have a mind."

"Done with you," agreed all the newcomers lustily, and with scant ceremony they pushed their way through the closely packed throng.

They took no notice of the mutterings of more sober customers, angered at seeing their mantles crushed or feeling their toes trodden on. It suddenly seemed as if the whole place belonged to these men and that the peaceful burghers of the city were only here on sufferance.

THE three philosophers had already called for some old Rhenish wine on draft. Käthi and Luise brought along pewter jugs and more goblets. Soon Gutter Rat and his friends were installed at the table, squeezed against one another on the narrow wooden benches. Pythagoras had already rolled off his corner seat and was sitting on the floor; Diogenes was perched on the corner of the table.

Socrates, aroused by the noise, opened a pair of heavy eyes and blinked around him in astonishment. Gutter Rat deposited his bulky form close beside the other and brought his large and grimy hand down on the shoulder of the sleepy philosopher.

"Hello, wise Socrates," he cried in his rough, husky voice. "I hope you have been having pleasant dreams."

"No, I have not," growled Socrates laconically.

"Take no heed of him," laughed Diogenes. "He has a hole in his head through which his good temper has been oozing out bit by bit. And yet, if you'll all believe me, he has been reposing there so peacefully and snoring so lustily that I thought he must be dreaming of heaven and the last trumpet call."

"I was dreaming of all the chances which Pythagoras and I have missed tonight owing to your —— nonsense," said Socrates, who was more sulky now than he had been before he went to sleep.

Pythagoras uttered a prolonged sigh and gazed meditatively down into the depths of his mug of ale. Gutter Rat and the others looked inquiringly from one philosopher to the other.

"Diogenes been at his tricks again?" asked Gutter Rat.

Socrates and Pythagoras nodded in gloomy response.

"Gallantry, eh? Some beauteous damsel, to succor whom we throw our life, our best chances away?" continued the other with ironical sympathy, the while Diogenes's entire face was wreathed in one huge, all-embracing smile. Gutter Rat admonished him with solemn voice and uplifted finger.

"Conduct unworthy a philosopher," he said.

"If he had only injured himself!" growled Socrates.

"And let us enjoy the gifts which a beneficent goddess was ready to pour into our lap," added Pythagoras dulcetly from the floor.

"Let's hear the story," concluded Gutter Rat.

The others clapped their mugs against the table top and shouted: "The story! The story!" to the accompaniment of din that drowned all other noises in the room.

Pythagoras from his lowly position began his narrative in a faint, injured tone of voice. He related the incidents of this night from the moment when the chance of possessing oneself with but little trouble of a tulip bulb worth fifteen thousand florins was so airily flouted, down to the awful moment when a young and beauteous lady made offers of influence and of money which were equally airily refused.

Gutter Rat and the others listened attentively. They specially relished the exciting incidents connected with the affray in Dam Straat, the breaking of Jan Tiele's nose and the dispersal of the mob with the aid of a lighted torch.

"Bravo! Splendid!" they shouted at intervals, and loudly expressed their regret at having missed such furious fun.

Socrates threw in a word or two now and then, when Pythagoras did not explain fully his own valorous position in the fight, but Diogenes said nothing at all. He allowed Pythagoras to tell the tale his own way; the recollection of it seemed to afford him vast amusement, for he hummed a lively tune to himself all the while.

Pythagoras now was mimicking his friend,

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throwing into this performance all the disgust which he felt.

"'Raise thy hand to my lips, mejuffrouw,'" he said, mincing his words. "'Momentarily I have not the use of mine own.'"

His round, beady eyes appealed to his listeners for sympathy, and there is no doubt that he got that in plenty. Gutter Rat more especially highly disapproved of the outcome of what might have proved a lucrative adventure.

"The rich jongejuffrouw might even have fallen in love with you," he said sternly to Diogenes, "and endowed you with her father's wealth and influence."

"That's just my complaint," said Pythagoras. "But no! What else do you think he said earlier in the evening?"

"Well?"

"'Tonight we'll behave like gentlemen,'" quoted the other, with ever growing disgust, "'and not like common thieves.'"

"Why tonight?" queried Gutter Rat in amazement. "Why more especially tonight?"

Pythagoras and Socrates both shrugged their shoulders and suggested no explanation. After which there was more vigorous clapping of mugs against the table top and Diogenes was loudly summoned to explain.

"Why tonight? Why tonight?" was shouted at him from every side.

Diogenes's face became for one brief moment quite grave—quite grave, be it said, but for his eyes, which could not have looked grave had they tried.

"BECAUSE," he said at last when the shouts around him had somewhat subsided, "I had three guilders in my wallet, because my night's lodging is assured for the next three nights, and because my chief creditor has died like a hero. Therefore, O comrades all, I could afford the luxury."

"What luxury?" sneered Gutter Rat in disgust. "To refuse the patronage of an influential burgher of this city, backed by the enthusiasm of the beauteous damsel, his daughter?"

"To refuse all patronage, good comrade," assented Diogenes with emphasis.

"Bah! For twenty-four hours!"

"Yes! For twenty-four hours, friend Gutter Rat, while those three florins last and I have a roof over my head for which I have already paid, I can for those four-and-twenty hours afford the luxury of doing exactly and only what it pleases me to do."

He threw up his head and stretched out his massive limbs with a gesture of infinite satisfaction, his merry, mocking glance sweeping over the company of watch-night revelers, out-at-elbows ragamuffins and sober burghers with their respectable vrouws, all of whom were gaping on him open-mouthed.

"For four-and-twenty hours, my dear Gutter Rat," he continued, after a long sigh of contentment; "that is, during this day which has just dawned and the night which must inevitably follow it, I am going to give myself the luxury of speaking only when I choose and of being dumb if the fancy so take me. While my three florins last and I know that I need not sleep out under the stars I shall owe fealty only to my whim. I shall dream when and what I like, sing when I like, walk in company or alone. For four-and-twenty hours I need not be the ivy that clings nor the hose that is dragged at the knee. I shall be at liberty to wear my sash awry, my shoes unbuckled, my hat tilted at the angle which pleases me best.

"Above all, O worthy rat of the gutter, I need not stoop for four-and-twenty hours one inch lower than I choose, or render aught to Cæsar, for Cæsar will have rendered naught to me. On this, the first day of the New Year, there is no man or woman living who can dictate to me what I shall do, and tonight in the lodgings for which I have paid, when I am asleep I can dream that I am climbing up the heights toward a mountain top which mayhap doth not stretch quite as far as the clouds, but which I can reach alone. Today and tonight I am a man and not a bit of ribbon that flutters at the breath of man or woman who has paid for the fluttering with patronage."

GRADUALLY, as he spoke and his fresh, young voice, sonorous with enthusiasm, rang clearly from end to end of the raftered room, conversation, laughter, bibulous songs, were stilled, and every one turned to look at the speaker, wondering who he could be. The good burghers of Haarlem had no liking for the foreign mercenaries, for whom they professed vast contempt because of their calling, and because of the excesses which they or their predecessors had committed at the

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storming of these very walls, an event which was within the memory of many.

Therefore, though they were attracted by the speaker, they were disgusted to find that he belonged to that rabble. But the women thought that he was goodly to look upon, with those merry, twinkling eyes of his, and that atmosphere of light-heartedness and of gaiety which he diffused around him. Some of the men who were there and who professed knowledge in such matters declared that this man's speech betrayed him as an Englishman.

"I like not the race," said a pompous man who sat with wife and kindred around a table loaded with good things. "I remember the English Leicester and his crowd, men of loose morals and doubtful piety; braggarts and roisterers we all thought them then. This man is very like some of them in appearance."

"Thou speakest truly, O wise citizen of this worthy Republic," said Diogenes, boldly answering the man's low-spoken words. "My father was one of the roisterers who came in English Leicester's train. An Englishman he of loose morals and doubtful piety, no doubt, but your sound Dutch example and my mother's Dutch blood—Heaven rest her soul!—have both sobered me since then."

He looked around at the crowd of faces, all of which were now turned toward him—kindly faces and angry ones, contemptuous eyes and good-natured ones, and some that expressed both compassion and reproof.

"By the Lord," he said, and as he spoke he threw back his head and burst into a loud and prolonged fit of laughter, "but I have never in my life seen so many ugly faces before!"

There were a murmur and many angry words among the assembly. One or two of the men half rose from their seats, scowling viciously and clenching their fists. Master Beek, perspiring with anxiety, saw these signs of a possible fray. The thought drove him well nigh frantic. An affray in his establishment on New Year's night! It was unthinkable! He rushed around to his customers with a veritable dictionary of soothing words upon his tongue.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" he entreated. "I beg of you to calm yourselves. I humbly beseech you to pay no heed to these men."

"All that you said just now was well spoken, sir," broke in a firm voice which proceeded from a group of gentlemen who sat at a table next to the one occupied by the philosophers and their friends. "But 'twere interesting to hear what you propose doing on the second day of this New Year."

"What I propose doing?" quoth Diogenes politely.

"Why, yes. You said just now that for four-and-twenty hours you were free to dream and to act as you will; but how will it be tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow, sir," rejoined Diogenes lightly, "I shall be as poor in pocket as the burghers of Haarlem are in wits, and then——"

"Yes? And then?"

"Why then, sir, I shall once more become an integral portion of that rabble to which you and your friends think no doubt that I rightly belong. I shall not have one silver coin in my wallet and in order to obtain a handful I shall be ready to sell my soul to the devil, my skin to the Stadtholder——"

"And your honor, sir?" queried the other with a sneer. "To whom will you sell that precious guerdon tomorrow?"

"To you, sir," retorted Diogenes promptly, "if you are short of the commodity."

AN ANGRY word rose to the other man's lips, but his eyes encountered those of his antagonist and something in the latter's look, something in the mocking eyes, the merry face, seemed to disarm him and to quench his wrath. He even laughed good-humoredly and said:

"Well spoken, sir. You had me fairly there with the point of your tongue. No doubt you are equally skilful with the point of your rapier——"

"It shall be at your service after tomorrow, sir," rejoined Diogenes lightly.

"You live by the profession of arms, sir? No offense; 'tis a noble calling, though none too lucrative, I understand."

"My wits supply, sir, what my sword can not always command."

"You are ambitious?"

"I told my friends just now wherein lay my ambition."

"Money—an independent competence, so I understand. But surely at your age, and—if you will pardon mine outspokenness—with your looks, sir, women, or mayhap one woman, must play some part in your dreams of the future."

"Women, sir," retorted Diogenes dryly,

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"should never play a leading *rôle* in the comedy of a philosopher's life. As a means to an end, perhaps—the final *dénouement*——"

"Always that one aim I see—a desire for complete independence which the possession of wealth alone can give."

"Always," replied the other curtly.

"And beyond that desire, what is your chief ambition, sir?"

"To be left alone when I have no mind to talk," said Diogenes with a smile which was so pleasant, so merry, so full of self-deprecating irony that it tempered the incivility of his reply.

Again the other bit his lip, checking an angry word. For some unexplained reason he appeared determined not to quarrel with this insolent young knave. The others stared at their friend in utter astonishment.

"What fly hath bitten Beresteyn's ear?" whispered one of them under his breath. "I have never known him so civil to a stranger or so unwilling to take offense."

Certainly the other man's good humor did not seem to have abated one jot. After an imperceptible moment's pause, he rejoined with perfect suavity:

"You do not belie your name, sir. I heard your friends calling you Diogenes, and I feel proud that you should look on me as Alexander and call on me to stand out of your sunshine."

"I crave your pardon, sir," said Diogenes, somewhat more seriously. "My incivility is unwarrantable in the face of your courtesy. No doubt it had its origin in the fact that like my namesake I happened to want nothing at the moment. Tomorrow, sir, if you are minded to pay for my services, to ask for my sword, my soul, or my wits, and in exchange will offer me the chance of winning a fortune, or of marrying a wife who is both rich and comely, why, sir, I shall be your man, and will e'en endeavor to satisfy you with the politeness of my speech and the promptness and efficiency of my deeds.

"Tomorrow, sir, you and the devil will have an equal chance to purchase my soul for a few thousand guilders, my wits for a paltry hundred, my skin for a good supper or a downy bed. Tomorrow the desire will seize me once again to possess wealth at any cost, and my friends here will have no cause to complain of my playing a part which becomes a penniless wastrel like myself so ill—the part of a gentleman.

"Until then, sir, I bid you good night. The hour is late and Mynheer Beek is desirous of closing this abode of pleasure. As for me, my lodgings being paid for, I do not care to leave them unoccupied."

Whereupon he arose and to Mynheer Beek—who came to him with that same ubiquitous smile which did duty for all the customers of "The Lame Cow"—he threw the three silver guilders which the latter demanded in payment for the wine and ale supplied to the honorable gentleman. Then, as he met the mocking glance of his former interlocutor, he said with a recrudescence of gaiety:

"I still have my lodgings, gentle sir, and need not sell my soul or my skin until after I have felt a gnawing desire for breakfast."

With a graceful flourish of his plumed hat he bowed to the assembled company and walked out of the tap-room of "The Lame Cow" with swagger that would have befitted the audience chamber of a king.

In his wake followed the band of his boon companions. They, too, strode out of the place with much jingle of steel and loud clatter of heavy boots and accouterments. They laughed and talked loudly as they left and gesticulated with an air of independence which once more drew upon them the wrathful looks and contemptuous shrugs of the sober townsfolk.

Diogenes alone, as he finally turned once again in the doorway, encountered many a timid glance leveled at him that was soft and kindly. These glances came from the women, alike from the young and from the old; for women are strange creatures of whims and of fancies, and there was something in the swaggering insolence of that young malapert that made them think of breezy days upon the seashore, of the song of the soaring lark, of hyacinths in bloom and the young larches on the edge of the wood.

And I imagine that their sluggish Dutch blood yielded to these influences and was gently stirred by memories of youth.

TO BE CONTINUED

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The Baby and the Wireless

by John A. Heffernan

MR. JACOB G. BUCHMULLER, grown plump amidships in the last two years, but still sharp-featured, still keen of glance and jaunty of gait, boarded the steamer *George Washington* at Bremerhaven. The advertising man of Armitage, Barnes & Curley, manufacturers of "Frazzled Friskies," Mr. Buchmuller had been spreading the fame of "The King of Breakfast Foods" as far east as Egypt, and was satisfied with his work.

He was even more pleased because he was on his way home, for "little old New York" was dear to him. Harold Armitage, son of old Tom Armitage, the head of the house, was spending a few weeks in London, with Edith, his wife, and their second baby, Thomas Armitage 2d. They were to meet Jake at Southampton and journey on home with him.

The North Sea was smooth that day, and Jake spent the afternoon on deck watching a tall young man of athletic build, who attracted him by the incongruity of the devil-may-care brown thatch of hair and the sober, ample and distinctly intellectual brow above which it perched.

It was less the appearance of the tall young man that held Jake's attention than the deep interest of that tall young man in a rippling song of a girl. Rippling red-gold hair in which the sea wind sported, rippling skirts and a rippling figure, rippling glances and rippling laughter——

"Gee, she belongs!" commented Jake, with a glance at the splendor of the blue-gold day. It was a joy to watch her standing there, the rose tint glowing beneath the satin corn color of her skin—a corn color that flashed into gold when she smiled.

The young man gazed down upon her timidly but ecstatically, and Jake wanted to clap him on the back and bid him, "Go to it!" Now, as of old, "all the world loves a lover."

It was evening before Jake had a chance to talk to the young man. He met him on the stairway as the two were making for the smoking-room.

"Joy to the world!" saluted Mr. Buchmuller, waving a cigar in the direction of the younger man. "Have a torch. They're real tobacco, *not* made in Germany."

The stranger took the cigar with a smile of appreciation. He had smoked some of the German stock.

"Rotten hemp, that Deutscher dope," said Jake. "Do you know, that old Quarantine oop back in Bremerhaven reeled me

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off a comic film about 'em. You know the gink—the *Obermedizinalrat,* they call him.

"He was telling me about fumigating ships. Had a bunch of highbrow prescriptioners, all friends of the Kaiser and fourpipers in the two-dollars-a-visit profession, down to see how sulfur smoke would affect cholera and plague bugs as well as cargo. He said among the things he tried his beautiful but unhealthy gas on, was cigars.

"After it was over he tried the cheroots and they were just as good as ever.

" 'I handed 'em 'round to the Imperial Commissioners who didn't know they had been fumigated and they smoked 'em without noticing any difference,' he said.

" 'From me, doc,' I told him, 'from me, there wasn't any.' He patted himself on the chin drapery and looked kind o' dreamy. Didn't get me. Sad case of retarded receptivity. Nice old whisker rack too, was the doc, and some derrickman with the stein, on my honah, Aloysius."

"Yes," said the stranger, "I know the Doctor. We're in the same business."

"Oh," said Jake, "that accounts for the entablature. You're a prescriptioner yourself?"

"I'm a bacteriologist," said the other.

"I never would 'a' dreamed it," said Jake. "Do they drink?"

"What? Do who drink?"

The young man's level brows bowed upward.

"Those 'back' things? I was thinking of going to the bar, and thought maybe a rickey, now——"

"Thank you, but I hardly have time," said the doctor, consulting his watch. "Miss Barr will have gotten her wraps. You'll excuse me, won't you?"

"Yes," said Jake, "I'll do that little thing you mentioned."

The bacteriologist vanished through a companionway, and Jake got his drink and turned in.

Morning found them alongside the dock at Southampton. The passengers from the early train had already come on board, but the big liner had the eleven o'clock London train to wait for, and Jake leaned over the rail and looked across the dock to the London & Northwestern rails.

THE train thundered down the dock at last, and the passengers crowded out and began to stream up the gang plank, a laughing, chattering throng, bidding farewell to friends, calling directions to porters. Jake watched, his keen eyes seeking the stalwart figure of young Armitage. There was a sharp tug at his elbow.

"Hello, Susan!" he exclaimed, as he swung round and faced Mrs. Armitage's nurse. "Where's the rest of the crowd?"

"Here!" said Susan, thrusting a white bundle into his arms. " 'Old 'im!"

"What?"

But Susan was gone, and he looked down bewildered into the pink fat face of Thomas Armitage, second of the name. He glanced down at the gang plank. Susan was fighting her way through the crowd, and the last he saw of her was a desperate, fighting little figure on the dock. Then he became aware that the tomtom was being beaten, and the stewards were crying out—

"All ashore!"

"That's one weird stunt!" muttered Jake. "That fool skirt'll get herself left behind. Now don't you wriggle, kid, or I'll do the faint thing!"

This last was addressed to Thomas Armitage 2d, who, to tell the truth, behaved very well and seemed quite content. Concluding that Armitage had boarded the vessel unobserved by him, Jake hurried to the Armitage suite. It was untenanted.

Jake gently deposited little Tom on the bed and scratched his head. A vague sense of uneasiness invaded his being.

With a start he realized that the engine was in motion. He looked out of the window. The *George Washington* was clear of the dock and was passing the big *Imperator,* which lay majestically at anchor in Southampton Water, due to sail at six in the evening. Jake heard his own name.

"Mr. Jacob G. Buchmuller! Mr. Jacob G. Buchmuller!" A steward's boy was paging him in the lobby outside.

Mr. Buchmuller stepped to the door.

"Hey, you! What do you want?" he said to the boy. "Shut that gap in the map, and don't wake the baby. Buchmuller, it are me."

"Wireless, sir," said the boy, handing him a despatch. Jake tore open the envelope and read:

London 9:12

J. G. BUCHMULLER,
SS. George Washington.

Missed train and boat. Hunt up Susan and baby and look out for them. Have arranged sail *Imperator,* 6 P.M. Take care baby. ARMITAGE.

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Three big beads of perspiration gathered on Jake's brow.

"Oi yoie! Oi yoie!" he groaned. "And Susan on the dock!"

"*Yow!*"

The cry behind Jake was so sudden and so vigorous that he nearly cracked his head against the top of the low door frame. Thomas Armitage was calling for attention. With the flow of perspiration much accelerated and his knees trembling, Jake walked over to the bed.

"Ooo-ooo!" he said in a voice that was meant to be at once gay and soothing, but that sounded like a wail.

"*Yow-wow-wow - wow - wow!*" exclaimed little Tom Armitage.

"Pitty Unkie Yakie p-p-p'ay wif b-b-baby!" ventured Jake, bravely.

"*Wow-yow-yow-woaaaw!*" answered little Tom.

Jake sat down on a chair and covered his face with his hands.

"Believe me," he moaned, "that was some high note."

Little Tom hit a higher one. Then it came to Jake like a flash of light. The Armitages would go back to the hotel. He touched a button, and in a few seconds a boy with a wireless pad was in the room. Jake seized it and scrawled.

MRS. HAROLD ARMITAGE,
HOTEL CECIL, LONDON.
Baby crying like blazes. What shall I do?
JAKE.

Then with his thumbs pressed to his ear vents he waited for the answer. After an eternity it came. Jake read it. It said:

Nurse him.
EDITH.

"Well, I'll be—be—be—— Oh, ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

It was so weird and mirthless a note that little Tom stopped yelling in sheer astonishment. The silence was so sudden that Jake felt as if he had been smacked with a length of lead pipe. It stunned him. Baby lay perfectly still for a while, a little smile dimpling his pink cheeks and his eyes fixed expectantly on the agonized countenance of Mr. Buchmuller. At last the big blue eyes were shadowed with trouble and the little lips began to quiver.

"Ha!" said Jake.

The shadow vanished and the dimples returned.

"Ha! Ha!"

The cherubic smile widened to a delighted grin, and the little body shook with a happy chuckle.

"Haw-haw!"

It was the German steward boy giving expression to *his* mirth after *his* peculiar fashion. Baby looked frightened, and Jake turned on the unhappy youth a look so full of fury that the lad backed toward the door.

"Stop!" commanded Buchmuller. "And don't do that again! Get me? Don't you gurgle a gurg, or I'll strangle you. Give me that pad."

The boy handed it over and Jake wrote:

MRS. HAROLD ARMITAGE,
HOTEL CECIL,
LONDON, ENG.
Bottle or——

He paused, his pencil suspended uncertainly over the sheet.

"Yeow!" began little Tom.

Jake signed the thing and thrust it at the messenger.

"Beat it and tell that operator to rush," he said. Then he turned toward the bed and exclaimed—

"Ha!"

Baby was chuckling happily; and Jake, sitting beside him, was emitting "Ha!" with clock-like regularity when the steward stuck his head in the door.

"The operator, he says, sir, 'or—what?' " said the lad.

"None of his flim-flam business! Ha! Ha! Tell him send it just as it is. Ha!" said Jake.

After another interminable period the answer came. Jake gave a great sigh of relief as this information reached him—

Bottles prepared food in suitcase marked baby's name.

He found the suitcase in the adjoining room. It was half full of nursing-bottles. One of these Jake handed to little Tom, who promptly stuck the nipple into his mouth. Contentedly he sucked away until the empty bottle slipped from his pudgy fist, the lashes drooped lower and lower over the blue eyes, and slumber came smiling.

Jake thanked Heaven for the respite. He ordered his dinner sent to the Armitage suite, and ate it while the little cherub slept on. The afternoon passed. The steward, coming in with a wireless, awakened little Tom. Jake gave him another bottle and

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then read the message. It was dated on board the *Imperator*, and read:

Met Susan Southampton. Lord's sake care for baby. Slip in suitcase for night. Just weighing anchor. HAROLD ARMITAGE.

Mr. Buchmuller scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Me slip into that for the night?" he murmured as he surveyed the suitcase. "Poor old Harold! He's getting dippy."

Baby finished his bottle and lay contentedly sucking his fat thumb. He did not again break into the upper register with the notes that had agonized Jake in the morning. Mr. Buchmuller had a peaceful evening meal, and soon after the steward had removed the dishes he tiptoed over to the crib to which he had transferred his charge. Little Tom was dreaming his baby dreams.

"Holy cats! I hope he don't get a tummy ache!" Jake prayed devoutly.

ALL evening long over the eastern Atlantic the messages fluttered back and forth.

Toward midnight came the mother's call across the dark sea:

Is baby sleeping?

Back the answer was flung to the racing *Imperator* from the *George Washington* masthead.

Like an angel.

In a few moments came the mother's call back across the wave:

All right. Don't forget to bathe him in the morning. Collapsible bath tub in baby's room.

"Yep," mused Jake as he sat on the side of his berth and looked at the message, "but that particular trouble belongs to tomorrow. Believe me, if I piled it on to today's heap the whole blooming outfit would go to smash. That straw goes on the other camel."

Saying which he thrust his feet under the quilt and switched off the light.

Jake awoke with a start. A long level sunbeam shot in through the porthole. Little Tom was screaming.

"I wonder," said Jake, "if the proper thing is the bath first or breakfast first. Guess it's breakfast."

He silenced Tom with the bottle. Then he made a search for the bath tub. The rubber contrivance was discovered at last. Jake picked it up and examined it carefully. Suddenly it shot up into its proper form, hitting Mr. Buchmuller on the nose incidentally.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "It works like an opera hat."

The steward brought in three wireless despatches. Jake read them in the following order:

Did baby sleep well?

Have water slightly more than body temperature for bath.

Special soap in bag.

Jake filled the little tub with water, testing it as to temperature with a thermometer. Then he got a bunch of towels and the cake of special soap. Next he took the baby on his knees and prepared him for the morning ablution.

Little Tom seemed to enjoy the proceedings thoroughly. He cooed and gurgled as Jake dipped him in the warm water. Much encouraged, Mr. Buchmuller lathered him with soap.

With a shock he realized that a soaped baby is slippery. Little Tom wriggled and twisted, while Jake desperately tried to hold him. He might as well have tried to hold quicksilver. That pink and intangible mite splashed face down into the bath tub.

Frantically now, Mr. Buchmuller tried to lift him. The perspiration was running from him in streams and his hair was on end.

"Help! Help!" he screamed at the top of his voice. Then inspiration came to him. With a whoop of joy he grabbed the tub and flopped it, bottom up, on the bed.

"Oh, Pork and Beans!" he exclaimed. "Oh, Leo Margerine!"

In the surge of his relief he was oblivious to the muffled protest under the inverted tub.

"What's the matter?"

Jake turned in the direction of the girlish voice. Molly Barr stood in the doorway.

"I was just going on deck for a morning walk and heard you scream," she exclaimed. "Is there anything—— Mercy, what's under the tub?"

Instantly she sprang to the bedside and with a single sweep uncovered the highly indignant cherub.

"A baby?" she exclaimed, gathering the youngster to her breast.

"Are you sure?" Jake asked weakly. "He

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isn't an eel or four of a kind or anything like that?"

Miss Barr looked at him with a wild suspicion.

"Dave!" she screamed. "Dave, come quick!"

Dave entered in one broad jump.

"He's crazy!" she said, leveling her finger at Mr. Buchmuller.

"You betcha!" agreed Jake with enthusiasm. "Dip the diplodocus, that's me. Say, doc, wouldn't you be all to the juju if some one handed you the job of taking care of something that doesn't speak your kind of language? That kid belongs to my best friends. They missed the boat and I'm trying to keep it alive as per instructions by wireless. It's some tough job, doc, and I'm all in."

"I see," said the doctor. "You'd better let Molly look after the baby. As for you, what you need is a drink."

Jake extended trembling, pleading hands.

"Lead me to it," he sobbed.

The *Imperator* swept by the *George Washington* that afternoon. At the rail of the latter Molly Barr held little Tom up in her arms, and Jake and the doctor waved handkerchiefs at three figures on the deck of the huge Hamburger.

"*Toooot, tooot, toooot!*"

The siren of the *Imperator* blew a salute to little Tom. Then the Hamburger forged ahead, but from the *George Washington* snapped out Jake Buchmuller's assurance:

Doctor and nurse looking after baby. Doctor a fine sport and nurse a peacherino. Meet us at Quarantine.

The Queen of the Species

by Prince Sarath Ghosh

THERE was a violent commotion in the palace park, by the mess room of the 99th Highlanders. King George and Queen Mary were to visit the Raja, and the Regiment had come ahead with its bagpipes in view of the festivities. The band had just finished practise, and the servants were laying dinner for the officers, when a panic arose.

"Kill! Kill!"

"Run, brothers, run!"

"There! Quick—jump through the window!"

A babel of voices, frightened, contradictory.

Some of the officers ran out of their tents, with revolvers.

"Turn on the light!" shouted one of them; for the mess room was cast into sudden darkness. "Where is the switch?"

"On the right of the door, sahib," answered the *consumah* from among the panic-stricken group of servants, who stood back a good twenty yards from the door. Some of them had hastily got together a few lanterns and torches.

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The officer who had spoken, a junior lieutenant, was going to put his hand in to feel for the switch—an act about forty times more risky than thrusting it into a lion's mouth.

"Stop!" cried the old Major, who came up puffing. "It may be just there—by the post!" He meant the foe.

So the officers stood in a circle ten yards from the door, each with his revolver pointed at it. But the foe did not emerge. The siege continued for half an hour, and the officers began to get hungry.

"Send for Moolraj!" the *consumah* whispered to the Major.

So Moolraj came, with curling lips. He was the chief of *shikaris* in the service of the Raja, and had passed through all intermediate grades, from forest ranger to serpent charmer. He glanced at the officers, and noted the gap between them and the door.

"The sahibs are wise," he said. "To slay the foe, and yet to die for certain is foolish!" For the man that crossed that threshold would be a blackened corpse in a few minutes and would have to be buried or cremated the same night.

An assistant followed behind Moolraj; he brought a large wicker basket and a reed flute having a large bulb in the middle. Moolraj silently motioned to the officers to stand back; then he squatted down on the ground ten yards from the door and began to play on the flute. The type of music was almost the same as that of the Highland bagpipes.

"By Jove, that's what caused the trouble!" the old Major commented in sudden wisdom. He had been long in India. "The regimental bagpipes!"

The others waited in expectation, not knowing what was going to happen—the ones new to India probably expecting a charging mass to hurl itself through the door. Instead, there was a soft thud, as if something light had dropped to the floor; and then a dark flicker at the threshold, scarcely perceptible in the dim illumination of the distant torches.

The next instant a black line emerged, elongated toward them, then came along the ground. One yard, two, three—just half way between it stopped, and reared a yard of its length in the air, thicker than a man's wrist. The rest of its body, another yard, coiled itself around beneath for support. The top of the black column expanded, larger than a saucer, and two tiny points of light broke out, one on each side; and from the front two thin wires seemed to emerge, and to dart in and out so quickly that the human eye could only just see them.

And the whole column swayed gently in the air, from side to side.

"Kala Nag!" whispered the servants from afar in awe.

"Black cobra!" muttered the Major. "And a queen, too!" He turned to the subaltern. "By gad, you have had a narrow escape!"

Aye, a bite from an ordinary cobra would kill any living creature in five to thirty minutes—flesh, fish, fowl or any reptile except another cobra. And the black cobra was the most virulent. And the king cobra the most pugnacious; whereas an ordinary one would molest none if left alone, a king cobra would take his stand on the Emperor's high road between Calcutta and Delhi, and challenge any creature, man or beast, to pass. And the queen cobra was somewhat more deadly than her lord, being the female of the species—as every man in India has known for forty centuries, though the prophets of the earth are just discovering it.

And now the queen cobra deigned not to cast a glance at the crowd of men standing respectfully in the background, British or Hindu. She swayed her body in ecstasy at the music. For the particular type of music produced by the flute of India, and to a certain extent by the bagpipes of Scotland, is what enraptures the cobra's soul; and hearing the strains, it will come across fields and hedges and ditches to dance and sway to it in rhythm. For if there were nothing on earth to subdue the cobra that can kill all other creatures, there would be nothing to prevent the cobra from subduing all earth—which would mar the design of creation.

Thus, while the assistant crept around treasonably from the back with the basket, Moolraj beguiled the queen from the front. Then suddenly, at a given signal, the assistant dropped the open basket over the cobra's head, and held her down. It was high treason! But the British officers were hungry, and wanted their dinner.

"But I shall tame her and make honorable amends," Moolraj murmured apologetically, as he thrust in the rest of her body, and slid a lid under the basket.

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"Eh? What?" the Major cried, now that all could talk in relief. "Do you mean to extract her fangs, and keep her for show? I know that you fellows do that."

"No, sahib," Moolraj answered proudly. "Keep her fangs intact and tame her. Make her a friend, a comrade."

"Great Scott! I never heard of that, in these twenty years in India!"

"Then ask him to tell the story," a voice answered from the back. "It is certainly rare!"

The Major turned. It was the Raja's son, who had come up with the Colonel. They had been chatting in the palace, and hearing the commotion had strolled out.

"Do you mean, Kumar sahib, that a cobra—black and a queen—has ever been tamed?" the Major asked incredulously.

The Prince laughed.

"Well, ask Moolraj to tell you the story after dinner."

But Moolraj looked deprecatingly at the Prince and said, "Not unless the Heaven-born is present."

"So be it," said the Prince, becoming serious at once. For the story had an element of delicacy which Moolraj cared not to voice without the presence of one of his own race. Thus, after dinner, the chief of *shikaris* began:

"FIFTEEN years ago, as the Heaven-born knows, a certain misfortune came upon me. I quarreled with the one that was dearest to me on earth. Fierce, passionate, headstrong, she yet loved me truly. But she was jealous. Suspecting me wrongly, in a moment of rage she struck at me blindly—then plunged the dagger into her own breast, vowing that we should die together."

Moolraj paused, and slowly undid his tunic. The scar he turned only toward the Prince; but the others could understand.

"I recovered, but not she. Then, learning that she had wronged me in her suspicions, she repented with her dying breath, and vowed to make reparation in a new incarnation. The wound had not healed completely then, and any sudden and violent strain caused it to bleed anew from time to time.

"Four years passed. As a serpent charmer, as I was then, I was much in demand in those temples that have the serpent dance on days of festival. So I had a collection of cobras in my baskets, with their fangs intact. The baskets were always securely closed, and I used the cobras only with the greatest caution.

"Thus for four years I sought relief in work. I had no joy nor solace at home, and seldom visited it; for I never married again. Once on my return after a long interval I found a crowd near my door. I heard the shouts and yells and saw the scurrying men. I hastened and learned the cause. It was a cobra; black and a queen. Some one had found it near my house. Usually such a cobra would be vicious and attack anything at sight; but this one seemed to wander about, paying heed to none. So the crowd, emboldened by her mildness, paused in their flight, then turned, and began to pelt her with stones from a safe distance.

"When I approached, a stone had just struck her a glancing blow on the head and rendered her insensible. I picked her up and carried her in, cursing the crowd. I revived her with cold water, and bathed her wounds.

"The foreign story teller who wrote the fable of the ungrateful serpent was a liar. Vengeful, animals might be; but none is ungrateful for kindness. That sin is reserved for man. Leastwise the fable writer knew nothing of the queen cobra. Leastwise he knew nothing of this queen I had rescued at my door.

"She grew to know me and love me. At feeding-time I held the fish a span away, and she reached out and took the fish, without so much as baring her fangs. What need had I, then, to break the fangs? Then gradually she came to coil herself around my wrist, while taking the fish from my fingers. Growing to know me still better, at last the day came when she sought to coil herself around my waistband and sleep, grateful for the warmth of my body. Thus I even carried her about with me.

"I had indeed wondered how she had come to be wandering near my house. For I had played no music there for three months. And the other cobras I kept in the temple; so that she could not have been drawn there for the company of her own species, like some animals. Thus I took her presence as a gift of Fate.

"Soon after a call came to go to Gwalior on duty. The temple there had its own serpents, so I left mine behind, save the one

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that now reposed around my waistband and traveled everywhere with me. For defense on the way I had an old double-barreled muzzle loader.

"I had to travel partly through jungle and tall grass. One day, having just passed through a stretch of the grass, I paused to rest under a tree; I faced the jungle, so that if danger appeared in that direction I could climb the tree instantly. Soon after I noticed a horseman approaching through the open country on my left. I wondered. As the sahibs know, horsemen are rare in India, except near cities; in the country the rich travel on elephants, the poor on foot. Soon I made him out; he was a sahib. Seeing me, he asked the way to the nearest public rest house. I told him I was going partly the same way. So he dismounted, threw the reins over the low bough of a tree a few yards on the left, and came and sat down beside me.

"I learned that he was new to the country. He had a number of coolies to carry his baggage from one rest house to the next, a matter of about ten miles, while he rode on ahead, and hoped to have some sport on the way. He carried a magazine rifle, and had also a large magazine pistol at his belt. He told me that he had ridden thus right through Uganda in Africa, and had killed several magnificent lions, besides other large animals. His horse was a splendid Arab, and from it he had often dropped a lion with a couple of shots from the rifle. The large magazine pistol he had used in emergencies. Several times, while off his guard, a lion had charged him from fifty yards; and he had poured a volley of quick shots from it into the animal, and bowled it over before it could reach him. As the pistol took about the same sized bullet as the rifle, and could carry several hundred yards, I believed him readily."

Moolraj paused a moment; then continued.

"He told me that he intended to kill a few tigers while in India. He thought that a royal Bengal tiger was about the same standard of animal as the large lion of Uganda, the finest in Africa."

"Whereas a Bengal tiger can walk through a pack of Uganda lions as a prize fighter can through a gang of hooligans," the Colonel gravely remarked, having hunted with the Raja's party—when thirty fighting elephants and sixty riflemen, two on each elephant, and each with high-power explosive bullets, succeeded in dropping one charging tiger; and that only just as it was leaping on the nearest elephant, having already received a dozen explosive bullets through its body.

"Or as the devil walked through Athlone," the Major added—and all the officers laughed.

"THE sahibs now laugh," Moolraj continued, "but I did not then. Instead, I tried to point out the mad folly of it to that sahib. I was handicapped in my argument, as I did not quite understand what he meant. I knew only a little English then, and he spoke differently from you sahibs."

"A Colonial, probably," the Colonel said.

"Or a Yankee," the Major opined.

"Whatever his nationality, he was a brave man," Moolraj went on.

"Too brave, and utterly unconscious of his danger. To begin with, a horse may face a lion, but never a tiger; no animal does, except a trained fighting-elephant. Moreover, a tiger is attracted by the smell of a horse, and has been known to stalk a horseman right up to the gates of a populous city. Also, the sahib had no idea of the vitality of a tiger, and its quickness when within striking distance. It could rush fifty yards before a horse could turn, or before the hunter could raise his rifle and take aim. Even then, with thirty balls through its body—each of which would bowl over a lion—a tiger might just reach and kill its killer in its death agony. I tried to convey all that to the sahib, but failed.

"With the words of warning undried upon my lips, I happened to look up. A little while before I had casually noticed the horse nibbling at a few blades of grass at its feet; but now it had stopped doing so, and was standing quite still, as still as a man might who was expecting something to happen.

"My vision embraced the front of the jungle, and I could see nothing. But the horse remained standing motionless, with outstretched neck—almost staring like a human being. Then I noticed its limbs; they seemed to become unsteady—a moment more, and they shook visibly. The tremor passed over the horse's entire body. Its knees knocked together; it gave a violent start, and broke into a cold sweat. A sound

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issued from its mouth, a faint whinny, piteous and almost inarticulate. The next instant the horse recoiled drunkenly, regained its balance with a lurch, then turned and plunged into a gallop.

"I did not wait to see which way it fled. Instead I leaped to my feet. The horse had faced the front of the jungle, and I had failed to realize for the moment that it could embrace in its vision a wide expanse to right and left. As I sprang up, something impelled me to turn instantly to the right—toward the side of the jungle. And in that direction there was a continuation of the tall grass toward us in irregular patches. I saw the grass waving, and the motion passed to the next patch—and the next—toward us. I waited to see no more.

" 'Up the tree—quick!' I cried to the sahib. But too late!

"The next instant the patch nearest us shook violently, the grass parted, and a flaming yellow head emerged. An enormous tiger!

"A snarl, a roar—and the tiger bounded toward us. I knew my end had come; yet with man's clinging to life I made a frantic clutch at the nearest bough. What avail? I knew I could reach but a yard or two, and would be torn down.

" 'Climb also!' I shrieked to the sahib. But instead he tried to swing the rifle around and point it at the tiger. Oh, the sahib was brave enough—so brave that he would have caused his own death and mine for certain, had he been quick enough to fire that shot. But Brahma had willed otherwise.

Before the sahib could raise the rifle to his shoulder and take exact aim, the tiger was upon us. The rifle availed nothing, except that the barrel deflected the blow of the tiger's paw. Thus the sahib received only a glancing shock from the tiger's shoulder. That hurled him upon me, and both of us against the trunk of the tree.

I was torn from my grasp, and my head banged against the tree. I heard a buzzing sound in my ear, the earth swam around me, and I fell in a huddled heap. I had a dim recollection of the tiger being carried past us several yards by its own impetus, and then I lost consciousness.

"How long I lay like that, I know not. It may have been a few minutes or several hours. On regaining consciousness my thoughts were confused. The jungle was wrapped in stillness.

"I was intensely weak, and felt that my tunic was wet. The old wound on my side had opened in the sudden shock, and I had bled profusely. In a few seconds full memory returned—and the thought of the tiger; surely it had turned after its own impetus, and leaped back at us? Then why had it not eaten me?

"With that thought came a terrible apprehension; perhaps it had eaten the sahib first; and thinking me to be dead, the tiger was letting me lie there for its next meal, and meanwhile was having its after-dinner *siesta* somewhere near. My first instinct was to open my eyes and look; but I saw only the trunk of the tree beside which I had fallen. I dared not move, nor even turn my head perceptibly.

"Lying on my side as I was, I slowly tilted up my chin a single inch. I caught a glimpse of something white just beyond the trunk. It was an arm—the sahib's; the palm upward; wherefore the face also would be turned upward.

"For a single instant a faint hope arose within me—that at least the sahib had not yet been eaten; but the next instant I remembered that a tiger would eat the body first, and then the legs; the arms might even be left untouched. And even if its human victim fell on his face, the tiger would turn over the body just that way in eating.

"Finding no proof in this of the sahib's fate, I tilted my head an inch farther—and saw that the arm was still in its sleeve. Even in that there was no real reason to hope, for the tiger might rend the clothes only at the parts to be eaten. Yet I fastened my gaze on the white cloth of the sleeve; with a panting heart I searched for a patch of red, a smear, or even a spot. There was none. Surely, in eating a newly killed victim there would be blood splashed all over, or trickled around. But there was no blood, on the cloth or on the ground.

"In that was the first ray of hope. . . . But no! The tiger may have killed and eaten some other prey earlier in the day, and was only waiting to be hungry again to eat either of us.

"But where was the tiger?

"I dared not turn my head to look; instead I could listen. I tried to catch the regular breathing, the rise and fall, of a sleeping animal; and in the case of a tiger it would be harsh and almost rasping. I

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should have heard it easily at fifty feet; but the jungle was still wrapped in stillness.

"A wild hope—had the tiger gone away? But the next instant I realized the futility of that hope. Even if gorged with a meal only an hour before, a tiger would not have departed without carrying away one of us to its den for the next meal. Thus the tiger must be there, somewhere. More than that: sometimes in entering a dark room, or in awaking suddenly in the dark, we instinctively feel the presence of some other living being in that room, man or animal. So it was then; I felt the presence of the tiger. But where?

"The only thing to do was to tilt up my head, slowly, imperceptibly, half an inch at a time. It seemed ages before I could increase the angle of vision by a single yard. At last I got my head as far back as I could, without moving my body visibly from that position. Looking with eyeballs turned upward to the utmost limit, I caught a vague glimpse of something. In an irresistible impulse I moved my head an inch farther back; and in doing so had to move my body also, however slightly. With a thump at my heart I saw. It was a yellow mass. The tiger! Not seven yards away!

"ICY fingers clutched at my heart. I felt a spasm at my throat. The cold sweat of terror broke in beads upon my brow.

"I could see only the tiger's hind quarters, but knew at once that it was not asleep. Aye, the hind feet were planted firmly on the ground, the tail straight outward along the ground, and the back bent low. *The tiger was crouching!* Would it leap the next instant and rend me?

"I felt that the cruel beast was playing with me, as a cat plays with a mouse. It knew it could reach me at a bound, had I tried to escape. Had it been watching me thus all the time, and tantalizing me? The suspense grew in intensity, and in anticipation I could feel the tiger's crunching jaws closing upon me, tearing lumps of flesh from my body. A drowning man sees his whole life in a flash; instead I saw the whole torture of my death in a flash. In that the agony was greater than I could bear, and I even longed for the tiger's fangs to end my torture.

"Could a defenseless man lie at the mercy of a tiger, and yet escape? Realize the magnitude of the peril! If a thousand foes held you up, each pointing a gun at your head, you might yet escape as by a miracle—if something happened to make the foes change their purpose. But a tiger never changes its purpose. As I lay before it, if a thousand men suddenly appeared and shot the tiger with a thousand explosive balls, it would still kill me in its death agony.

"I may have moved, or uttered some gurgling sound; in that agonizing moment I may have done both unconsciously. The tiger's tail lashed out erect, and I heard a low growl. My end had come. I closed my eyes, awaiting the blow—the merciful blow that would end my agony.

"Thus I waited for death; but death did not come. In reckless callousness—nay, cursing Fate at this prolonged torture, I opened my eyes again. There was an angry snarl. The tiger's back arched up suddenly, quivered in pent-up rage; then subsided into the crouching, waiting attitude.

"In vague wonder I racked my mind in thought. Why did not the tiger leap upon me? Why was it waiting instead? What was that I heard? A *new* sound! Faint, scarcely audible, but quite near!

"Like a gentle escape of air from a tiny nozzle! Too faint to be a whistle, yet something like it. Once, twice, thrice—pause. A second snarl came from the tiger, and again this new sound arose in response. Merciful Brahma, what was it?

"A hiss!

"The crouching tiger replied more angrily, and was answered as angrily. Snarl and hiss, snarl and hiss—it was a terrible duet of mutual hate and challenge that rang forth in the stillness of the jungle.

"As one in a dream I tilted up my head, now reckless if noticed by the tiger. A wondrous sight met my gaze. The tiger crouched, its head toward me, its forefeet planted. It glared toward me in impotent fury, but not *at* me.

"Facing the tiger, and a yard behind me, stood my black cobra. Her hood was expanded to the fullest, her forked tongue darted in and out like lightning, her eyes sparkling like diamonds. Half her length was reared in the air like a column of black marble between me and the tiger, the other half coiled beneath her for support, with the tail reversed half a loop at the end. Serpent charmer that I was, I realized its coming significance.

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"And full understanding of what had happened flashed through my mind. In the tiger's onslaught that had hurled me against the tree the cobra had been rudely awakened from her sleep, and perchance cast out of her resting place from my waist. Then before the tiger could recover from its own impetus, turn, and leap again, my beloved had flung herself between me and my terrible foe.

"What else I understood, albeit vaguely and in my inmost soul, it matters not to others. Did I see in a flash my past life? My quarrel with the one I loved best on earth? And four years later—four years in which I had cherished her memory—this queen cobra that had sought my house? Was this to be her reparation, her martyrdom—her immolation to cleanse the sins of a thousand incarnations, and attain Nirvana?

"I could do naught else but lie there. This might be some supreme issue between the tiger and my beloved, in which none could intervene, not Brahma himself; for all creatures must work out their final destiny by their own deeds, unaided. Some supreme issue between the erring woman and the tiger—between the tempted and the tempter.

"Forsooth, even if I had the rifle at hand and mortally wounded the tiger, it would serve only to bring on the climax at once and the instant death of us all. Better far to wait and watch to see if there might be any other ending than that.

"And verily I was fascinated and spellbound as I watched this unique conflict. Never before in the history of the jungle had a black cobra, whether a king or queen, met a tiger in mortal combat in sight of man. People watch a prize fight with bated breath knowing that money is at stake; here my life was at stake.

"Now the snarl, now the hiss, arose above the other in defiance and in the accumulated hatred of a thousand incarnations. Now the tail lashed in rising fury against the yellow stripes, as if the tiger were lashing itself into recklessness; now the uplifted column swayed to right and left in response, as if to anticipate the tiger's coming onslaught.

"Thus they faced each other, each outside the range of the other, each seeking to inveigle the other into the first move. Each realized the power of the other. The tiger, the king of the jungle, could crush a buffalo's skull at a single blow; and no multitude of men or beasts could stay its onslaught, if it sought to run amuck and die, and kill, and kill, and kill in the act of dying.

"And in like manner the cobra, the queen of its species, could slay any creature of the earth, if she were only resolved to kill and die. One sweep of the tiger's paw would have crushed the serpent into a mass of quivering flesh; one scratch of the serpent's fang on the tiger's body would have turned it into a blackened corpse. It was a fit match, and Nature's supreme trial.

"Suddenly the tiger raised its head, lashed its tail, and arched its back. Instantly the black column paused in mid-air. The tiger dropped its head, pressed its jaw to the ground, as if to leap straight in front—then instead swerved aside and sought to rush past the serpent. But that same instant the suspended column shot out sidewise like a lightning flash. With a violent lurch the tiger shrank back from the poison fangs; and none but a tiger could have been quick enough. A span farther, and the fangs would have been embedded in the yellow mass.

"Seeing that a direct attack was useless, the tiger tried to fence for an opening, to get past its foeman's sword arm. Verily it was now parry and thrust, lunge and recovery, between those deadly weapons—the tiger's paw and the cobra's fangs. The paw crept sneaking along the ground; the uplifted column bent down in a curve, and swung backward and forward in short and quick movement. The stealthy paw paused as a feint, and in the tenth part of a second the swinging coil arrested its motion, and hung expectant, vigilant.

"Foiled in its intention, the tiger receded a step and raised its paw in the air, and approached—intending to strike the cobra down from above with a single blow, at a possible opportunity. In response the uplifted column began to oscillate sidewise. It was beyond the tiger's reach, but always at an equal distance from its paw, and guarding both exits, right and left. The tiger knew by instinct that for success in that mode of attack it could aim but a single blow, instantaneous and on the cobra's head; for if the blow missed by an inch, the fangs would be fastened on the paw as it shot past.

"The tiger stood intent, head raised, paw uplifted, as a cat watches a butterfly cir-

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cling before it. Thrice the tiger sought a feint, as if to strike from one side, then changing instantly to the other; and thrice the cobra curved back her body at the middle as quickly, and gained a greater margin to strike to right or left.

"Foiled yet again, the tiger dropped its paw, bent its head upon the ground with a snarl. But even as its back stiffened for the spring, a hiss answered the snarl; the swinging coil poised instantly, and the diamond eyes followed each quiver of the tiger's body like a searchlight.

"Realizing at last that such methods must inevitably fail, the tiger tried deeper strategy. Its back relaxed its tension, its tail ceased to lash. The tiger stretched itself indolently and subsided on the ground, its head between its forepaws. The whole body became a mass of laziness. Even the erstwhile blazing eyes ceased their vigilance, and half closed as if in coming sleep.

"That all this was a deep-laid plot I realized at once; but it gave me breathing time to think, to look around, and scheme, which I could not do before in safety. To scheme, because at the crisis I too must act.

"The first thing I did was to turn my body once over and look for the sahib's rifle; for my old muzzle loader was useless. Glancing along the ground, I saw the rifle ten yards away—hurled from the sahib's hand by the tiger's paw. Then, looking again, my heart ceased its rising hope; the barrel was broken from the stock at the joint where the blow had fallen. It was useless.

"I HAD ceased to look toward the sahib, feeling sure that he had been killed in the tiger's onslaught; but now glancing that way from my more favorable position, I could see the upper half of his body. It was all intact, the face toward me; the eyes closed, as it seemed at that angle. But a sudden thought struck me. Slowly, gradually, I brought my hand before my face, and held up the forefinger to my lips, as a man signals for caution; once, twice, thrice.

Then Brahma heard my inward prayer, and answered my dawning hope. The sahib's eyes opened, then seemed to close at once. I understood. The sahib had recovered consciousness, and had been furtively watching the combat, even as I. And he was watching still, beneath his eyelids. Thus I signaled to him by mute gestures:

"'Be ready for the crisis! Do as I do!'

"Then I turned my body once more and faced the combatants. That the tiger would resign the battle once begun was impossible—the one creature on earth of which that could be said absolutely; nay, the greater the opposition, the more relentless its purpose to fight to a finish.

"Moreover, my faith taught me that if the tiger embodied something more than the beast of prey, it had its own destiny to fulfil relentlessly; for he who is asked to play the villain of the piece and receive the hisses may be as great a character as he who plays the hero and receives the applause. If the sahibs will not accept that doctrine of the Hindu faith, there remained a third reason, albeit a material one, why the tiger would fight to a finish; it had struck down two human victims and was about to begin its feast when the cobra had intervened. And the tiger would not be robbed of its prey by all the earth.

"For a brief moment the cobra had been puzzled by the tiger's stratagem; then by some serpentine instinct she realized the tiger's purpose. And yet the advantage was all turned against her. It was a terrible strain upon her strength to hold up half her length in the air by sheer muscular effort. She must reserve that strength for the supreme conflict.

"Cautiously, gradually, the uplifted column began to descend, the hood still expanded, the vigilant eyes still fixed on the tiger. So cautious was the descent, that if need be she could have reversed the motion in a fraction of a second; even in reaching the ground the black column pointed at the yellow mass like a rifle. The lower half of the body that had borne the full weight of the upper half, now uncoiled and swept around slowly, till it also lay in a straight line with the tiger.

"Only the hood remained in a state of war, and the glittering eyes still kept ceaseless watch on the yellow mass lying in seeming repose. Verily it was but an armed truce before the final grapple.

"An ominous stillness. The lull before the storm. The deep, oppressive silence before the thunderclap. Not a movement, not a tremor, to betray the pent-up volcano raging within each. Were it not for those glistening eyes, the cobra might have

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seemed a painted black line upon a canvas of green; and but for the massive chest rising and falling with each suppressed breath, the tiger might have seemed a stuffed effigy.

"Then slowly, almost imperceptibly, the yellow paws, that had been lying in inactivity before the huge head, began to curve inward under the projecting whiskers, then inward under the nose, the jaw; inward under the panting chest—and there lay still, pressing the ground, with muscles hardened like steel. And slowly, almost imperceptibly, the hind legs that had also been lying lazily along the ground curled inward under the hips, under the belly. There they scraped the ground furtively, till they found firm hold and bore the weight of the mass above. The tail alone continued to lie a moment more, swishing off a buzzing fly. Then even that came in a rigid line with the body.

"And my beloved answered the beast, maneuver for maneuver, perhaps even unnoticed by it. The lower half of her body, that had lain like a flabby piece of rubber, began to coil again. One complete circle it made; then the portion beyond it reversed in half a loop, the end of the tail pressing the ground.

"Serpent charmer that I was, I knew the cobra's range when leaping from the unfolding coil—the tail kicking off the ground, and the coil unwinding and shooting forward. Having thus made a solid base for support, my beloved raised the front half of her body a mere inch like a rigid rod, to make sure; then lay still. But the hood expanding to the fullest, the forked tongue darting in and out, and the diamond eyes sparkling their brightest, marked the rigid tension at which the bolt rested, ready to hurl itself into the air.

"A terrific roar—and the huge yellow mass shot up in the air. A horrible fear seized me. I knew that the cunning beast had waited for all this, and was now coming to me *over* the cobra. Seven feet up in the air, eight, nine, ten—it was coming upon me beyond my beloved's protecting arm. Brahma! Was this my end? Down, down, in a mighty curve the cruel beast was coming upon me!

"But, Brahma! What was that? Like a bolt from a crossbow my beloved sprang—six feet of her length, and four more from the impetus of the unfolding coil—and reached the tiger's throat in midair. The unwinding coil coiled anew around the tiger's neck. With a heavy thud both reached the ground, not a yard from me.

"A second before I had tried to leap to my feet, then had realized my weakness from the loss of blood. Tottering, lurching, reeling like a drunken man, I sought to cast myself from the deadly zone, the arena of death; for the tiger rolled over and over along the ground, clawing frantically at its throat with a choking, gurgling sound, devastating the ground all around even with the spent sweep of its paws.

"In passing the sahib I made a frantic gesture for him to flee also; but he only raised himself on his elbow—afterward I learned that his ankle was broken, and he could not run. The next instant I heard a quick series of shots. I did not pause to look, but reeled headlong from the arena. A sudden gush of blood from my old wound, and I fell unconscious, hearing in my swooning ears the mingled sound of tearing grass and snapping twigs, of rending flesh and stifled growls.

"WHEN I regained my senses I saw a crowd of villagers gathered around the sahib. They had seen the fleeing horse, captured it, and followed its track. Thus they found us.

"But my thoughts were of the terrible battle I had witnessed. I arose painfully and entered the arena. The tiger indeed was dead; it lay on its back, its feet in the air. Already it was blackened and putrid. The poison had done its work.

"But my beloved also was dead—torn into ribbons by the tiger's frantic claws, and hanging in strings from its claws, and strewing its chest. Only one piece remained intact—her head. Though cut off at the neck by the tiger's claws, it lay buried deep in the tiger's throat. Not all the strength of a tiger could tear away that grip. It lay there, jaw to jaw, fang to fang, buried in the putrid flesh. All that remained of my beloved.

"My tale is ended, and I have not the heart to say more, except this: the sahib had emptied his magazine pistol in the fray. You sahibs of all nations are too fond of burning gunpowder; you want to have a bang at something. The *shikari* alone shoots only when he can kill.

"In this case the combatants, locked in a deadly embrace, took no more notice of the

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shots than a couple of prize fighters would of a child's tin whistle. But luckily for the sahib, the shots only entered the tiger's body; had one hit and severed a single coil of the cobra, the tiger might have devastated a little more of the space in its death agony—including the sahib.

"The tiger's skin? Not even the village pariahs would touch it. They piled up wood and burned the tiger's carcass.

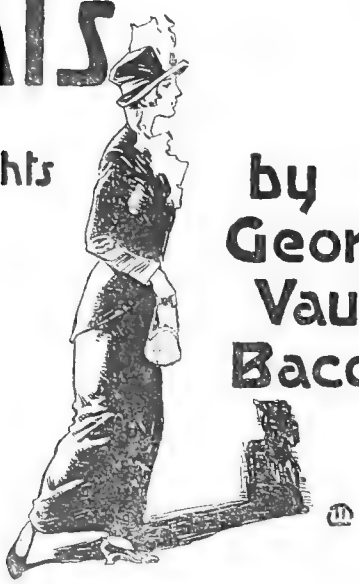
"Thus my beloved also was cremated then; and I poured a libation to her soul in its passing to Nirvana. From that day of her reparation and martyrdom my old wound began to heal completely. The English doctor indeed said that some septic matter had remained in the wound from the dagger, and that this gush of blood had at last cast it off, and thus enabled the wound to heal permanently. But I know better; my heart tells me so.

"*Salaam aleikum*—peace be with you!"

Ideals

A Tale of the White Lights

by George Vaux Bacon



EVERYBODY has ideals.

Immaculate, self-contained, expressionless, Mr. Percy Howard was lounging gracefully against the side of the Original Joe's Shoe-Shining Establishment on Monroe Street near the Majestic Theater, tapping his tan pumps and saffron silk socks with a swagger malacca stick, when his Ideal came from the direction of the Home of the Baby Lobster and walked gracefully and casually across his line of vision.

The malacca stick abruptly ceased its tapping. A trim, trig figure, clad in well tailored lines, the Ideal walked with head erect, sapphire eyes decorously looking straight before her. Under a fetching little hat with a coquettish feather, bright chestnut curls caressed a piquant, kissable face harmonizing with the white little column of throat rising from a delicate convolvulus of dainty linen.

She passed him. Malacca stick under his arm, he followed. She approached Clark Street, passing Dearborn. It was evening, and only La Salle Street is more deserted than that part of Monroe after business hours. The alluringly expensive looking lights of Rector's glowed yellowly and brightly from across the street. Several couples were entering. Chicago people for some strange reason like to eat in a cellar, so all that appeared on the surface of Rector's was the entrance.

Opposite the entrance, the Ideal stopped and looked squarely around at her pursuer. Mr. Howard experienced a shock succeeded by a qualm. She was a beauty; but he

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feared that again an Ideal was to be shattered as in many instances before. He waited for the usual "come-on."

But he was delightfully disappointed.

"WHAT seems to be the matter, boob?" queried the fair one. "Are you a hungry kitten? Do I look like cream to you? Let go your hawser and pull out. I'm no tugboat. Disappear before I get my cousin Mike Kelly on the next corner to polish his brass buttons with your pompadour. Do you get me, Harold? Fade!"

Mr. Howard tried to lean on his malacca stick, his soul filled with a great joy. Here was a regular woman; not one of the kind that gets scared and hollers, but one that had the stuff in her he liked. She had the makings of a real heroine. And she could wear clothes. He returned her stare with interest.

"Say, Mildred," he came back, "my name's Percy, but I'm no Harold; get me? You've probably hit these sidewalks a few hundred times with your suède kicks before I lamped you this evening, but you never piped me trailin' any pheasant. Nothin' like that stuff in mine. I'm too busy. I'm a business man, see?"

Quoth she—

"A business man, eh?"

She looked him over with an eye that was no less keen in its perceptions for the fact that it was large and of a blue as deep as dreaming Summer seas. Percy tumbled to the reason for the calm scrutiny and flushed to the roots of his carefully trained hair.

"Say, Gertrude," he said, "I'm on; but you've got the wrong steer. If you'll promise not to call out the regulars, I'll prove to you that I'm a bad one; but not so bad as you seem to think. Listen here. I'm wise to this burg, and to anybody that's got a half-Nelson on Clark Street, Broadway is in the Stone Age.

"I've seen every kind of millinery that carries a hat and, believe me, there never was one of them that I fell for at a glance, or one that pulled any sweet stuff out o' my achin' heart anywhere along the line. But when I see you come glidin' by this evenin' my goat is got and I falls. I hit the pavement of Monroe Street like a two-hundred-pound book agent doin' a Brodie out of a tenth-story window. I'm woozy. I'm as full of sugar and honey-goo as a peppermint mint is of pepper——"

"Say, call your operator. You're on the wrong exchange," remarked the lady, half turning as if haughtily to go, her coquettish feather waving disdainfully above her chic little hat. Mr. Howard almost ran up to her.

"Wait!" he said. "Look!"

She drew in her breath with a quick gasp. Out of his pocket he pulled a watch, a chain, two scarf pins and a small roll of bills. Her eyes were attracted to them as if by a lodestone.

"You see," explained Mr. Howard, "I'm a dip—a crook; but I ain't what you thought I was."

He slowly returned the things to his pocket.

"I'm Percy Howard, and—" he threw out his chest a little— "if I do say so myself, the best-dressed dip in Chicago.

"I'm lonesome, see? I want to have some one for dinner with me. I'm sick o' chasin' around alone. Say girly, it's up to you. Will you holler for your cousin the cop or come with me? Wha' d'you say to Rector's; eh?"

The lady looked at him for a full half minute as if trying to reason something out.

"I ain't used to bein' picked up on the street this way," she said presently, but she did not draw away from him; she only seemed anxious to see him more clearly.

"What you ain't used to'll do you good for the novelty of the thing," suggested Mr. Howard. "What's your handle—I mean your name?"

"Sadie MacDonald."

"That's a good name," commented Mr. Howard with the air of one blue-blood recognizing another. "I knew you was a lady the minute I lamped you. Come on."

THEY crossed the street and entered Rector's, where after the usual ceremony of incurring indebtedness by checking his hat, Mr. Howard with much manner, ushered Miss MacDonald into the cream-white room where Chicago epicures indulge their passion for good cooking in a basement. They were both too awed by the "class" around them to talk much.

After dinner Mr. Howard suggested the theater. Miss MacDonald accepted the invitation, and at eight thirty they were in a stage box at the Palace.

A single in the third number made eyes

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at Mr. Howard, who, staring back with contemptuous indifference for a few minutes, finally turned to his partner and said:

"You see that stuff? She was doin' the movies six months and finally breaks into the big time on her shape. For pretty near a year she blew around town tellin' everybody I was stuck on her class and stayin' up nights thinkin' of flowers to be delivered with her breakfast in her room at the Sherman. She never lived there in her life, an' is just sore because I never would look at her. She's tryin' to get even now by lettin' on as though there was a whole lot between me an' her for your benefit."

"Ain't she the cat, though!" commented Miss MacDonald.

"Ain't that the truth!" confirmed Mr. Howard. "Say, Miss MacDonald, what's the use o' talkin'! Nobody's got a look-in but you."

After the show they repaired to Heinley's, at the corner of Monroe and Dearborn, where the elect of the Clark-Madison-Dearborn Rialto go for supper and cabaret after the theater, and where any "talent" in the house, from a grand opera chorus man to a lady whistler from the "movies," is welcome to contribute to the melodious gaiety of the evening.

Mr. Howard and Miss MacDonald got a table where they could command a view of the entertainment and at the same time get a pretty good general idea of their fellow cabareteers.

HEINLEY'S is the one downtown café in Chicago catering to a midnight custom in which there are waitresses, and the proprietor has looked to it that they detract nothing from the decorativeness of his establishment. With pride proper to the occasion, mingled with a fine discretion in the loudness of his tone, Mr. Howard ordered wine from the dimpled blonde goddess who waited on his table. Only the tables within the fourth row from them heard the order. The occupants stared at the hero of the evening. He glowed with pride and unconsciously straightened his necktie, which was of azure shot with gold.

"These midnight suppers ain't complete without the bubbles," he explained to Miss MacDonald. "Not that I want to get you soused or get soused myself," he added gallantly, "but just for the sake of sociableness. If a fellah in my line drinks much o' this stuff, his hand gets unsteady, an' that's the cooler, quick."

The orchestra struck up "Till the Sands of the Desert Grow Cold." Mr. Howard and Miss MacDonald drained their glasses in sentimental appreciation. Then he leaned over toward her, his elbows on the table, till she could smell the eau de quinine on his hair, and he became aware that she used bouquet talcum powder on her nose.

"You wa'n't sore at nothin' I said to you when we met, was you, Miss MacDonald?" he queried, parrying for an opening.

She smiled reassuringly.

" 'Course I wasn't sore, but a lady has got to be careful about who she talks to, you know."

"Sure, I know that, but you never can tell how a lady's goin' to take things—just for the reason you say, that she can't be too careful who she meets," he added hastily.

"I could see you was a gentleman," said Miss MacDonald.

"Well, I don't know that I'd go so far as to say that about myself," said Mr. Howard; "but I thank you for the compliment just the same. Y'see, I seen you pass by the Majestic, an' I fell for you right off. I just couldn't let you get away from me forever like people do ordinarily.

"All my life I've had an ideal of a girl I wanted to meet an' talk to—maybe only for a few minutes. But I wanted to meet her an' talk to her—a girl that was beautiful like you are an' lovely an' could carry clothes an' knew how to walk. She'd have to be a lady, I figured; see? and at the same time not one o' these stuck-up State-Street effects that won't talk to her chauffeur because she's married some flathead that's so good at bein' a grocer's clerk he made a fortune out of it; but a real woman-lady—one with a soul under her style, you get me?"

"Gee, you can certainly talk some, Mr. Howard," Miss MacDonald murmured.

"You're the girl I've dreamed about—that's why, Miss MacDonald. You're class and on the level and at the same time you're wise. I own up I don't feel like they say people do in story books or like a guy that usually goes nuts over a rag right off the bat. I ain't got the slightest desire to grab hold o' you an' rumple your collar or sneak you into a booth table somewhere

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and love around an' make fools out o' both of us every time the waiter drops around to scare us into buying another cocktail. All I want is just to sit an' look at you. D'you get my meaning?"

MISS MACDONALD gazed at him dreamily. "Say, you talk like a poet," she said.

Mr. Howard glowed. Somehow the word "poet" coming from her was different. Up to that time he had considered that it was a synonym for loony. She invested it with beauty. He emptied his third glass of champagne, marveling.

"Go on, Mr. Howard," said Miss MacDonald. "I love to hear you talk. Honest, you're as good as Shakespeare.

"You're kiddin'," asserted Mr. Howard, smiling.

"No, honest I ain't. I could listen to you talk f'rever. I love the way you talk."

The orchestra returned manfully to the attack with the soul-stirring strains of "Oh, You Wonderful Girl." Mr. Howard was stirred to the depths of his being.

"Miss MacDonald," he said, "when I look into your eyes, I think o' the ocean. I was raised on the ocean when I was a kid, an' I love it. It's funny how a fellah never forgets his love for the Big Water. And your hair is just like the brown woods that used to whisper secrets to me when I was a little chap, in the valleys back of the sea; your throat is white like the white vi'lets and your cheeks are like the tea-roses that used to grow around my mother's front yard before she an' the old man died.

"It was after they died I come to the city an' went to the bad the way I've done. Time after time I've made up my mind to cut the rough stuff and get on the level; but the swag was always so easy to swipe. Every time I'd see a guy with a chunk of ice on his scarf pin, my fingers'd itch till I a'most went crazy."

He laid his hands on the table and looked at them pensively, accusingly. Miss MacDonald also looked at them. Beautiful hands they were, delicate, nervous, perfectly manicured, white, the hands of a gentleman and an artist—too small to be the hands of any man but one born to live by his wits.

"I've tried to be straight in other ways when I found I couldn't keep straight with my hands. I've given away a lot of the money I've dipped to people I knew needed it awful bad in the hopes that God'd let me get by an' save me from bein' nabbed by the bulls. The idea o' goin' to the pen scares me to death. I know I've done a lot more o' good with a lot o' people's money than they would 'a' done with it themselves."

Miss MacDonald was looking at him with wide-open eyes.

"Gee, you're real religious, Mr. Howard," she said slowly. "I don' know but what you're the most religious man I ever met. Maybe you got the right idea, too. I remember once goin' to a church an' the preacher gets up an' says a lot o' things I didn't know nothin' about because I wasn't raised in no church and don't understand all them technical terms they use; but he wound up his spiel with somethin' I did get, an' somehow it stuck in my mind. From what I've heard tell o' religion, it struck me as the real goods because it seemed to be a sort o' boilin'-down of everythin' I've heard, though I know I ain't heard so much."

"What was that?" asked Mr. Howard respectfully.

" 'Charity covereth a multitude o' sins.' An' you seem to have sort o' hit the idea somehow or another without thinkin'. But you oughtn't to have shown me that junk an' told me all that about yourself, Mr. Howard. You don't know who I am. I may turn you over to the bulls any minute."

"I should worry an' get hectic about that," assured Mr. Howard. "You ain't the kind of a girl that does them fool stunts. It wouldn't do a lot o' good anyhow, because by the time anybody got over here, all the stuff I got would 'a' disappeared. I ain't been makin' things disappear from other people's pockets for five years without bein' able to make them disappear from my own, y'know. But what'd you want to talk that way for?"

"I don't," said Miss MacDonald. "I was only foolin'. I've dove around through different stratums of society in this burg for a couple of years myself, and I've met a lot of guys that wore stand-up collars and shoved around the little box on the end of a stick in church every Sunday; but I never met one that could get within three feet of a girl an' look her in the eyes all the time while she's got a V-shaped collar on

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——" She suddenly stopped and blushed rosily at her own audacity.

"Say," said Mr. Howard, "you ain't said nothin' to blush about. You're a sensible girl, that's all. Honest, I hate to see a girl posin' around as an innocent little dub when she's wiser than'd be good for a man of forty, an' a good sensible girl like you is one in a million. Gee, you're beautiful when you blush, kid."

WHEREUPON Miss MacDonald blushed still more and attempted to hide her embarrassment by drinking another glass of champagne.

"Where d'you work?" asked Mr. Howard in an easy essay to relieve her confusion.

"Me?"

She set the hollow-stemmed glass down.

"Oh, I'm the Chief o' Police's private secretary."

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "What d'you know about that, now? Ain't I the merry little chance taker?"

"You sure are," she murmured, smiling at him over the brim of another glass.

Reverting from the romantic to the severely classic, the orchestra at that moment attempted a selection which gradually appeared to be the "Intermezzo" from "Cavalleria Rusticana" with a tendency on the part of the players to hurry the tempo more than was originally intended by the composer.

The music of the "Intermezzo" is beautiful to any one. Miss MacDonald sat listening to it, entranced, while Mr. Howard, with thoroughly masculine instinct inherited from medieval generations of men at arms, became enchanted by the work of the snare-drum player. The subtly sweet *motif* stole into Miss MacDonald's heart and there, meeting the gracious warmth of the wine, rose to her eyes till they brightened as overcast seas brighten suddenly when through a rift in storm clouds breaks Summer sunlight. The "Intermezzo" faded into a second of golden silence. In the midst of the vigorous applause that followed, she spoke.

"Gee, I could die to that there intermesso."

"Do you like grand opera?" he asked, with a sudden rush of pride in her.

"Oh, do I!" she sighed. "I adore 'Carmen!' "

"You got me on that highbrow stuff, all right," admired Mr. Howard. "Say, what d'you say we blow out o' this place an' chase around some? Maybe you'd like to go to some other place."

"All right," said Miss MacDonald.

As they ascended to the street, Miss MacDonald indicated a dark gentleman with fierce eyes and a very low forehead sitting in a corner near the stairs.

"See that?" she asked.

"Sure," said Mr. Howard. "Why?"

"He's one o' the cleverest dicks on the plain-clothes squad."

She laughed into his eyes.

"Ain't you the regular little girl, though!" he murmured.

Before they had walked a block, Miss MacDonald showed signs of being tired.

"I guess I'd better be goin' home," she said presently. "I'm really awful tired, though I've enjoyed myself ever so much; but I have to get up early in the mornin' an' get on the job."

"Sure," said Mr. Howard tenderly. "I know. I'll take you home."

THEY walked over to Wabash Avenue and took a Cottage Grove car which in due time brought them to Thirty-first Street where they descended. They started toward Michigan Avenue. In a shadowed nook, Miss MacDonald stopped.

"I guess I'll leave you here," she said. "I wouldn't want my landlady to see me comin' home with a fellah so late, an' you never can tell when that woman is goin' to be up an' peekin' around."

"Just as you say, Miss MacDonald," said Mr. Howard.

She held out her hand. He took it.

"You're a good fellah," she murmured. "Gee, I wish you was on the square. Take it from me, the crook game is phony from joker to deuce. There ain't nothin' in it. Cut it, an' go to sellin' ribbons or somethin'. You know your fifteen per is your own anyhow, and no bulls can take it away from you then."

Mr. Howard's voice came back tenderly.

"Honest, little girl," he said, "I ain't got no right to be talkin' to you, I know; but if you was to say the word——"

He hesitated.

"Try an' see," she urged softly, her sapphire eyes shining in the dusk. She stepped,

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with apparent unconsciousness, a little closer to him.

He grasped her suddenly and pressed his lips upon hers and found that they were as soft and sweet as rose petals. She struggled for a moment, then lay still in his embrace. He kissed her cheeks and throat and hair.

"Kid, I love you somethin' terrible!" he muttered hoarsely after a minute, partly releasing her. She flung her arms about him and kissed him in return, fairly and frankly on the lips.

"You had that comin' to you anyhow; you gave me a good blow-out, Percy," she murmured; and turning suddenly, fled. He stood staring dumbly after her. When he recovered himself a few moments later he tried to follow her; but she had completely disappeared.

Then he took a car and returned downtown.

MAISIE SNIDER, who had been Miss Sadie MacDonald for the evening and was the cleverest and most thoroughly expert shoplifter in Chicago, rolled into her comfortable bed in a certain expensive hotel on Michigan Avenue a half an hour later.

"He was a sweet kid," she murmured to herself, "but gee!" She laughed musically to herself. "Ain't men funny!"

And she slept the sleep of the fair unjust.

At that moment, Mr. Howard, with the miserable balance left of his small roll of bills after the evening's entertainment, was trying meekly to persuade the proprietor of his third-rate hotel near Chicago Avenue to let him into his room.

"Nothin' doin'," the irate innkeeper replied.

Mr. Howard offered him the watch, chain and two scarf pins he had been unable to pawn, as security.

"Beat it an' come back with the coin," returned the proprietor wearily. "Then you get the trunk. Not till then; see?"

Mr. Howard, the picture of dejection, gazed at his tyrant. Then suddenly his chest swelled, he threw his head back, and to the astonished lord of the rooms and corridors announced:

"Well, I've lived tonight anyhow. I should worry," and walked out.

"Bugs," commented the proprietor to himself.

At his usual job the following afternoon, Mr. Howard in his asbestos cage unwound reel after reel of astonishing adventures for the patrons of the Psyche Moving-Picture Theater. Formerly they had thrilled him at the first glance as they thrilled the audience. Now his hand spun with blasé speed. He smiled wearily as the calciums snapped. Gentlemanly bandits and fair women moved across the screen. One film showed a beautiful saleslady's love reform a hardened burglar. Mr. Howard sniffed.

He had *lived* that!

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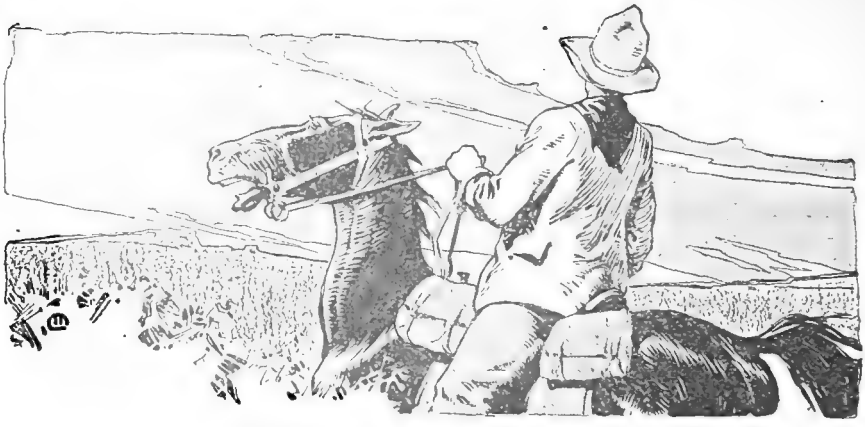

The Range Rider

by William West

SYNOPSIS—Pretty young ***Helen Beran*** comes to Pine Village, Ariz., with her visionary tenderfoot father, to settle on a near-by ranch in the Black Mesa Forest Reserve, which Beran had bought from one ***Nephi Lane.*** Being only a squatter, Lane thought that he had no right to the land he had sold. With the help of a shyster lawyer-politician named ***Dick Forbes,*** Nephi's brother and father, ***David*** and ***Moroni Lane,*** attempt further to defraud the Berans by selling them sheep for more than the animals are worth, and again by obtaining stock control of a sheep-grazing company which the Berans had formed with their neighbor, ***Bill McGhie,*** and a ***Mr. Baker*** of Baker & Puddifoot, stockmen. In each case, however, they are caught in their own trap.

This result is due partly to circumstances and partly to their stupidity, but most of all to the superior cleverness of ***Barclay Hyatt,*** the Federal Range Rider, who has interested himself in the Berans on Helen's account. The Lanes have now trumped up a damage suit against the Berans. Meantime Hyatt, who seems well connected, gets even with Forbes by using his influence to defeat the shyster in the latter's attempt to go to Congress.

Incidental to these activities, the Range Rider rescues Helen from Dave Lane, who—despite the fact that he is already married to ***Hilda Petersen,*** the local school teacher—has attempted to compromise the girl and so force her into a Mormon marriage with him.

CHAPTER XXIII

MORE ABOUT THE RANGER—AND THE LAW

THERE had been long days when Helen sat in the courtroom and listened to the arguments and bickerings of counsel, Mr. Meadows, for the complainant, gallantly striving to make a plausible case out of the hopelessly jumbled stupidities that had been perpetrated by his clients, and Egerton for the defense, arguing little, objecting frequently, and generally being sustained by the bored jurist who heard the evidence. In due course Helen gave her own testimony, briefly on the direct examination and changing it little on cross-examination. It was over sooner than she had expected, and the case as a whole progressed rapidly.

Yet even so, the Judge more than once expressed impatience as the complainant produced his witnesses to prove that Beran had represented such and such to be the scope and intentions of the company. To all of which Egerton declined to cross-examine, contenting himself with the proof that the articles of incorporation had been properly filed with the Secretary of the Territory and that the books were open to inspection by any stock holder. So they came to the day when both sides rested and awaited the opinion of the Court.

Mr. Baker had attended the trial of the

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case and spent much of his time at the Egerton home. On the night before the day on which the Judge was to give his opinion he had called and discussed the case at some length with the lawyer and the Berans. During this discussion Helen had commented on the interest and help that the Ranger had extended to them.

"It always puzzled me, Mr. Baker, to know why you should be so ready to advance money in such an enterprise. I suspect that Mr. Hyatt had something to do with that."

Baker, who was a great, brown stockman, with a flow of colloquial eloquence, grinned at her.

"Which you ain't guessed half of it at that, Miss Beran," he said. "Clay done wrote to me and all the same as ordered me to risk my *dinero* in that fool outfit, meanin' no offense to you-all. I didn't see no reason why I should, and said so, but he said that there was plenty profit in it for me and that he'd guarantee me against loss, and I could take all the rake-off.

"That ranch of ours really belongs to him and his folks, you know, and where there ain't no chance of losing I ain't the man to hesitate none, especially as I owe a good deal to that fellow. I think he's locoed on some points, like this idea o' his that he is responsible for killin' that *muchacho*, but there ain't no use in arguin' with him, so I just let Egerton go ahead and draw up the articles and coughed up my share when the time came. I ain't got but five thousand back, but as you have the land, which was all that was valuable, I ain't goin' to kick."

"But," said Helen, "he insists that he *was* responsible for that death, though he would never tell me about it; and, though it happened here, I have never heard it mentioned by any one except Mr. Forbes. A boy called something at him on the street, but it was Spanish and I did not understand it, though it seemed to have a great deal of effect on Mr. Hyatt."

"One of the Mexican kids, I reckon, who's got his ignorant knot full o' the yarns this Forbes *lobo* has been spreadin'. But didn't that boy ever tell you what the fool thing was?"

"He never told me anything except that he was a soldier and that he did an extremely brave thing after the War, though he didn't think very much of that, as it appeared."

"There ain't no accountin' at all for some folks," said Baker. "Sometimes I think it's accordin' to how they're raised, and then again I think this here heredity has a lot to do with it. He didn't get them fool notions from his pa, nohow, that's whatever, but his ma was given to seein' ghosts and things like that for some time, and used to get up circles and talk a heap to spirits that didn't seem to me to have a lot more sense than she did herself, judgin' by the messages they sent her, which the same was some puerile and piddlin' to my thinkin'.

"Not that Clay took after her none in them pursuits, but he always had a sort o' habit of losin' himself—subjective thinkin' or something of that sort, a scientific sharp done told his pa once when the boy had the mountain fever and went clean off his nut.

"Old man Hyatt was a sure-enough long horn and he didn't harbor no visions of ghosts nor nothin' and he wasn't any too sympathetic to Clay's dreamin', neither, which maybe didn't do the boy much good, though it hardened him a heap. Hyatt put him to work early, though he sent him to college, too, and every Summer the boy rode on the *rodeos* and learned his pa's business.

"We-all noticed that when there was anything of a problem come up, like some way to get a cow out of a bog when there didn't seem to be no way, Clay would go into a brown study and sort of be lost to all surroundin's. But when he come out of it he generally could tell us how to get that cow critter out whole, though he didn't quite know how he come to figure the thing out.

"There was a lot o' things like that which was a bit queer about him, but not to such an extent that he was dotty. It was only enough to make old man Hyatt think he wasn't quite steady in the mind, which he was, all right, and when he made his will the old man done left all his lucre in trust so that Clay couldn't get to squanderin' it none on them spirits his mother was so fond of an' which Hyatt thought might come around and worm themselves into the confidence of his too susceptible son. Which he needn't have been scared none, because Clay was that sharp that them puny spirits wouldn't have had no chance with him.

"Maybe it was because the old man was hard on the boy, or maybe it was just natural cussedness, but Clay pretty soon developed a streak that wouldn't have been

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good for him if he hadn't been able to *make* good. We generally have a lot o' *hombres* hereaways that are given to admiration of themselves and unnecessary proclamation thereof, but, if they can't ride their high hoss without pullin' leather, it ain't often that their stay is long and salubrious.

"I reckon maybe a Mexican nurse he had —her name was Dolores, though she wasn't nigh that handsome herself—put some o' them notions in his head and if she did, she got *her* punishment all right. It was a streak of thinkin' he was all outdoors and the inside of the house to boot that showed in him. There wasn't nothin' in the way of ridin', ropin', brandin', bulldoggin', fightin', or drinkin' he couldn't do better than any one else, to hear him tell it.

"It wouldn't have been so bad and we'd soon have laughed it out of him, but the meanest and aggravatin'est thing about it was that it was *true*. We done went and brought hosses here that no one could ride, hopin' that they'd throw him and knock the conceit out o' him; but they didn't. He done went and rode them and then told us all how he always told us what a man he was and that he didn't mind showin' us. And worse than that was the fact that, even when he went around braggin' about himself, he did it in such a way that people liked him just the same.

"He wasn't so blamed dissipated as he might have been, and he didn't get drunk and go hornin' into trouble thataway. He would drink when his capacity was questioned, but the liquor didn't seem to have no effect on him whatever. Apparently he only imbibed to show how easy it was to him. And he didn't fight none, though he handled a six gun like Billy the Kid. That old nurse of his, who up and got married for the second time and had a son about a year old at this time—which was after he come back from Cuba—used to go around and swear he was a sort of demigod and I reckon he sort o' thought she wasn't so far off, at that.

"YOU heard about what he done in Cuba? Well, when he went and let them try them experiments on him, you can bet we-all back here was willin' to allow that he was a pretty big fellow, even if he did admit it himself. We was sure proud of him, you bet, and I reckon the folks in Washington was too, because they never hesitated when he applied for that job as Ranger, but offered him his pick of any position in the Service, though he wouldn't take nothing but that measly place at sixty dollars a month.

"He come back home when he got out of the hospital and he was just a shadow of himself, but he hadn't lost much of his confidence. He said no Cuban fever could lay *him* out for no length of time, and he bet Forbes, who used to try to stir him up to risk his neck on all occasions, that he'd be well enough on Pioneer Day to ride the worst outlaw they could pick—not in the field, remember, but in the small paddock where the hosses were kept.

"He wasn't well by no means when Pioneer Day come around, but that didn't kill his confidence, neither. Forbes he come around and offered an extension of time, but he did it in a way that was best calculated to stir Clay up to refuse it, which he did, of course. He swore he could ride any hoss that ever was foaled, sick or well. He cursed every one of us that tried to talk to him and there wasn't no use at all in tryin' to make him see reason. He wasn't drinkin' none in them days and was on a diet which made him irritable a plenty and he was still bilious from the remains of that fever.

"Pioneer Day come round and we was all mighty glad when it appeared that there wasn't no very bad *caballos* in the bunch they had rounded up, though one of them had a snaky reputation. This was the one that Forbes picked for Clay to ride and he was so sore at us tryin' to stop him that he didn't tell nobody when it was comin' off except Forbes and one or two others, so that there wasn't many of his friends there at the time. But we got the true facts from those that were there.

"When Clay come out to the corral he was a little shaky from weakness and Forbes suggested that he take a drink out of his flask, which Clay did, without no thought whatever. It appeared to brace him up a lot and nobody noticed anything wrong, though one Mexican herder told me that he became a little wanderin' in his talk a short time after he took the swig. He afterward thought Forbes had doped the liquor, but we know that he didn't.

"Clay was about to mount and seemed all right when there come bustin' in that nurse of his who had heard or dreamed that he was goin' to ride. She had a dream,

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that's certain, but I reckon she didn't have none so vivid as she afterward told about. Them Mexicans is credulous a heap, and always know more than any one else after a thing has happened.

"But the fact remains that she busted up to Clay in the corral while he was standin' by the blindfolded horse, ready to mount. There wasn't much room in the corral and the people there had taken to the fence, all but the fellow that was holdin' the horse and was to slip the blind. This Dolores comes a-rackin' in and grabs Clay by the arm.

"'*Mto chiquito!*' she chirps. 'Ride not to-day! I have dreamed a dream of death!'

"The fellow that held the horse told me that Clay's eyes were sort of blank and dull and that he started to turn away from the horse as meek as Moses, just like an obedient kid. But just then Forbes hollers out:

"'Nurse come to take you home to bed, Clay? I thought you was well enough to ride anything with hair on it!'

"Then Clay turned to him and looked sort of blank at him and Forbes yelled, 'Go on and ride, you yellow windbag!' The fellow that held the hoss says that Clay didn't speak exactly like a fellow that's mad or reckless drunk, but just turned to the woman and said, sort of mechanical:

"'Get out o' here! I'm goin' to ride!'

"With that he jerks the hackamore reins out o' the man's hands an' sweeps the blind from the hoss, while the fellow dove for the fence as fast as he could run. But the woman had her baby in her arms an' I reckon she was sort o' stunned, for she only half turned away and didn't seem to know what to do, while Clay had jumped for the saddle, with the hoss pitchin' like a fiend.

"He made it, too, but he never got his feet set in the stirrups. The hoss gave about three jumps and Clay went off as if he had no more sense of balance nor strength of leg than the woman's baby. He might have been a bale of hay, the way he flew through the air, and as he shot past the woman, his spur caught the child's head. I reckon the infant was dead before Clay hit the ground, which he did like a sack of meal, and lay there as if he was dead, too."

Helen drew a sharp breath of horror as the bald details of the tragedy were told in the ranchman's emotionless voice.

"Ah!" she said. "Pitiful! But it was pure accident!"

The ranchman shook a puzzled head.

"There was more to it than accident, though I ain't scientific sharp enough to say what it was. As I say, the boy was lyin' there as dead to the world as if he had been shot, while that Mexican woman, that had always regarded him as if he was her own son, looked at her baby and cursed him as only a Mexican can curse.

"But he didn't hear her. Remember that. He was plumb unconscious and he remained so for over ten hours. They brought him in to us and we had in Doc. Alerding, who is some scientist and grades right up with the top hands of the medical business. And we made a quick and thorough investigation of the affair without any delay. And here is what we found out with reasonable certainty:

"First: We got Forbes's flask and made sure it hadn't been tampered with none. There wasn't a thing but good and not particularly strong whisky in it.

"Second. Clay had taken just one good swig from that flask and hadn't had another drink in weeks.

"Third. He had turned away with perfect docility when the nurse first spoke to him, but had acted as he did the instant Forbes yelled at him. And he didn't do it like he was drunk, but more like he was in some sort of trance.

"Fourth. Although he had lit like a sack of meal and lay there like a log, he wasn't even *bruised*, at least not badly enough to account for his bein' unconscious that away for so long.

"Fifth. When he did come out of that stupor he was in, although it's as certain as taxes that he was unconscious while she cursed him, *he remembered every word that the woman had uttered.*

"WELL, the doc seemed to think it wasn't no mystery. He allowed the boy had been bilious, which accounted for the fact that one drink of whisky had such an effect on him, and I can *sabe* that, for I've known it to happen before to fellows that was copper-lined. But he says that Clay is some like his mother, though a heap better balanced, and susceptible to suggestion or somethin' like that.

"Here he was in a state borderin' on a trance when the woman racks in on him, an' he starts to obey her suggestion when Forbes butts in with a stronger one. He can't ride no hoss in that state, as you can see, and he

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promptly gets heaved off and the accident happens. But he's unconscious before he ever gets on the brute and he don't know nothin' about that accident, whatever.

"But, as he lies there, that old harridan ups and cusses him out and assumes pretty powerful that he's actually massacred that *muchacho* of hers, which ain't the case at all. But it has an effect, for he is in a receptive state a heap, as the doc explains, and it gets fastened a plenty in his subjective mind that he *has* gone and butchered that innocent. When he comes out of his trance he has that 'fixed idea,' as the doc calls it, and, though we argues with him and half convinces him, still he can't get clear away from the notion.

"It plumb takes the sap out of him, and he loses all the cockiness he used to have and gets plenty moody, thataway. Finally he just goes out and gets that job, after fixin' it that the old woman gets more money and comforts than she ever dreamed of in her wildest deboshes, and thereafter he herds a heap by himself in the Mogollons. Which is plenty witless, but ain't to be prevented none that we can see.

"Yet the doc allows that the case ain't hopeless. He says that there ain't no danger of Clay's gettin' dotty about spirits like his ma did because he's got his father's head on him and that's a heap too solid fer any frivolous spirit to make much impression on it. He says he always would be susceptible to some extent to what he called 'intuitive perceptions,' and that this here notion of his might last for years, gradually growin' weaker, unless some other 'fixed idea' of superior strength busted into his nut and crowded the other out.

"And I reckon the doc knew what he was talkin' about. I noticed, since last Spring, that Clay is a whole lot less moody and seems happier than he has been since the affair happened. And it's a good thing, says the doc, that he doesn't get a suggestion to butcher some enemy when he's in that state, because if he hated the fellow pretty bad he'd probably sieve him a plenty."

It was with conflicting emotions that Helen heard this weird story, more uncanny from the fact that it was told by the matter-of-fact and skeptical ranchman. Yet the predominating conception in her mind was one of profound pity and sympathy for the Ranger and a strong desire to see him and endeavor to soothe him with the assurance of her comprehension.

There were elements of horror and mystery in it that, if told about an ordinary person, would have led her to look upon him as one somewhat removed from the normal plane of sanity, but, though she was conscious of this fact, the idea that the Ranger was not all that was excellent was dismissed by her with indignation. She didn't care if he *was* a sort of psychic! He was her own right gentle knight and she only wanted the chance to show him how deep her trust in him lay.

WHEN they went to the courtroom and took their places to await the reading of the Judge's opinion, the thoughts engendered by the story were still uppermost in her mind and she barely noted the Judge's entrance and the opening of his reading. She might have been the Ranger, indeed, hearing the droning words only with her subjective intelligence while her real brain was busy with other concerns. Only the final words of the judge's opinion reached her ears:

"The relief asked will be refused and the costs assessed against the complainants."

The droning voice ceased and the Judge rustled his papers. Still in a brown study, Helen followed the others of her party from the room, almost heedless of their congratulations. They still owned their ranch, but that was a matter of small moment to her at present. She wondered if she would soon see again the figure of the Ranger as he rode with hands folded on his saddle-horn and eyes bent on the road in front.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE RANGER LIES AND LOVES

THE Ranger sat on the fence surrounding Bill McGhie's corral. Inside the corral the restless, brilliant Pivot Rock Sorrel—the great untamed mustang which he had captured in that wild morning's chase a few days before—strode or ran in swift circlings and turns. The body was bright reddish brown and the hair that flowed in mane and tail was tawny in the sunlight that flashed on the sleek sides and rippling muscles of the great horse.

His eyes were wild and fierce, but they had lost a great deal of the fear that had once been their most striking characteristic. In fact the Ranger whistled softly and the

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horse, after glancing cautiously at the seated figure, minced carefully up to it and reached out a timid head to get the apple that was extended to him. But a movement at some distance sent him instantly in a wild whirl to the far side of the enclosure, whence he tore around the fence as if seeking some place where he might break through or leap over.

Bill McGhie came out from behind a pile of straw and climbed up beside the Ranger.

"I wouldn't have thought you could do it," he said. "You sure do beat time with hosses."

"He doesn't look the same as he did, does he?" asked the Ranger. "I reckon that Forbes would be a little sorry that he gave me his interest if he could look at that."

"Grain and groomin' sure makes a big difference," acknowledged Bill. "But I reckon the biggest difference is in the way you go to breakin' him. You couldn't have rid him none whatever a month ago. He killed that Oiler *vaquero* of Olcott's as if he was a tenderfoot learnin' to ride, instead of the best wrangler in the Territory. Now look at him! He lets you-all crawl all over him just like a hobby hoss."

"Kindness, William, will do wonders," said the Ranger. "Would you like to try to be the first that rides that beast?"

"Me!" said Bill. "Much obliged, but I ain't made my will yet. Ride him yourself, if kindness does so much fer that brute's disposition. I could be right lovin' to him fer a year, but I reckon I wouldn't go to straddlin' him, nohow, no matter how he done appreciated it. It ain't affection. It's hypnotism, that's whatever!"

"Kindness only, William," repeated the Ranger.

"Maybe so," agreed Bill. "But I got my doubts. Kindness ain't a-goin' to tame no tigers like that locoed *caballo*."

"It will tame bears, anyway," said the Ranger, "for I have tried it."

"G'wan!" said Bill. "Tame my aunt!"

"Perhaps even your aunt, though I don't know the lady," reiterated the Ranger. "Anyway, I tamed a bear—a grizzly bear, at that—just by loving kindness and attention, once; tamed him so thoroughly that I broke him to saddle all same like a horse. And, William, believe me or not, that bear was one of the best steeds I ever mounted."

"Don't worry," said Bill. "I ain't a-goin' to believe you none."

"He was a splendid horse for traveling around the mountains on," the Ranger resumed. "That bear would go where a horse would have been unable to keep his feet, and you just couldn't wear the brute out. And affectionate! He'd stand for hours when I got off of him and wait for me to remount."

"What became of this here circus beast?" asked Bill.

"It was a regrettable accident that caused me to lose him," sighed the Ranger. "It all came from not being able to tell one bear from another. It was this way. There were a lot of bears in that section and one day I met five big silver tips face to face on a narrow ledge where there was no retreat. There was no time to try the effect of kindness on them and I was forced to dismount hurriedly and join battle with them.

"It was a terrific fight, William, and we wrestled up and down that narrow path for what seemed hours of confused struggle to me. But finally I gained the victory after superhuman efforts and the five bears lay there dead at my feet. I mounted my trusty steed, which had faithfully awaited my fate, and rode away, wounded, but proud and happy."

"I don't blame you none," snorted Bill, "killin' five bears thataway! But what come of the bear you was so fond of?"

"Alas!" said the Ranger, as he dropped from the fence. "When I had ridden a mile or two I noticed something peculiar about my steed, and on examining closely, I discovered that in the *mêlée* I had killed my own bear and was riding one of the wild ones."

"You ain't the only one that is wounded over that story," said Bill after a few moments of silence. He descended also and made his way toward the house.

"Where are you going, William?" asked the Ranger, as he fell into step beside the gloomy Bill.

"I'm a-goin' to tell that yarn to Skinner down to the road house and stick him fer the drinks," said Bill.

"If you do," said the Ranger, when he had reached his horse, which was being patiently held by the mousehound, "the spoils belong to me. It is my story. However, as I am going over to Beran's, I won't take any now. Is Miss Helen there?"

"I reckon so," said Bill. "She's generally around the place lookin' after the plowin'

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and ranch work. That girl is a sure-enough wonder, she is. Why, she didn't know an irrigatin' ditch from a crop of lucerne a month ago, but now she's a-givin' orders to the hands and a-seein' that everything goes into the ground right, and she won't pay out a nickel until she knows what it's required for and then she won't always do it unless it's plumb necessary. She knows a sight more about sheep than I do and she ain't got much to learn about farmin' neither."

THE Ranger nodded and rode away, going directly to the other ranch, where Beran and his daughter were living since they had returned from Prescott a month or two before. It was now July and the ranch work was in full blast. The Ranger cast his eye over the erstwhile brown slopes, which now were plowed and ditched and sown to lucerne and timothy, thanks to the water that the engineer from Fossil Creek had successfully diverted on to the ground from the great spring on the Mountain.

Behind the ranch buildings were the new corrals and dipping-vats, and a power house showed where the water was chained to do more than fertilize the ground. The house, as the Ranger knew, for he had seen to it, was now lighted by electricity, while the dynamos furnished power for a great deal of the ranch work. It was no longer the home of drudgery and discontent.

The Ranger rode up to the door and went in to where Helen was sitting at her desk. She had a Mexican servant now to do the housework, and could devote her time to business. She looked as if the change in affairs had done her good. The old discontent and weariness were gone from her eyes, and though she was grave it was a gravity that sat well on her. But it was hard to realize that such a little figure could contain the force necessary to run this big ranch.

She rose from her desk to greet the Ranger, for she had not seen him since her return. She had often thought of all the things she intended to tell him when she should meet him again, and of the best way to let him know that the shadow that hung over him did not modify her regard for him in the least, but when he appeared the task seemed suddenly beyond her powers. Yet there was a swelling tide of feeling in her breast that fairly cried out for expression, and she realized, what she had hardly confessed to herself heretofore, that the Ranger, whether he had killed or was the victim of circumstances, was everything to her.

But there in Prescott he had seemed a rather pitiful thing, to be cherished and comforted, while here he loomed before her, quiet and forceful, strong in his self-reliance, proud in his loneliness and hard in his mastery of himself. The things she had wished to say seemed inadequate, ridiculous.

And the Ranger felt very little of what he appeared to feel. For he had been alone on his Mountain for two months and during that time there had been with him always a waking vision of that dainty figure in brown duck, with sweet face and dark, silky hair. He knew from the first what she had meant and now meant to him. Yet in those earlier days he had held that thought at arm's length and dismissed it as a dream that could not become reality. It lay below his consciousness and will and was overlaid by the obsession that he was cursed.

Yet, when he had torn her from the arms of Dave Lane, and for some days thereafter, that feeling had almost left him, and in its place had come a strong desire and a new awakening to pride and self-respect. But it had gone again while the old shadow settled inexorably upon his mind. Still, there had been a weakening of that influence and less introspection, which had gradually increased as he thought more and more of what might have been.

And now, as he looked at her, he felt a swift wave of desire to catch her up in his arms and take her with him, whither he cared not—just to mount and ride exultantly, glad in the sweet nearness of her and confident against all the world. For who could stop him; who could keep pace with him when he was once in the saddle, and who face him to take her from him? The man felt no sense of strangeness and shame as the old, old arrogance of his brilliant and sensational youth swept over him. It was different, somehow. He could be all that he had thought himself and more if this was to be his reward. And Helen, astonished to see the wild, confident light leaping in his eyes, instead of murmuring her sympathy, felt a half welcome fear and stepped back with her hands across her breast.

"What—what is it?"

She would have given much to have recalled the betraying words when she realized

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how they must sound. But the Ranger raised his hand to his forehead and appeared to sweep the mounting impulses from his brain. He smiled and answered her quite naturally.

"Nothing!" he said. "You turn my head a little. It is not any too steady!"

Helen blushed. "I think it is," she said. "If you refer to that story that I heard in Prescott, I want you to know that I don't think you were at all to blame. I heard every word of it, and I think it is terrible that you should feel so about it."

She was conscious that she was hurrying to tell him without regard to the carefully thought-out sentences that had seemed appropriate to this occasion, and that there was little or nothing of her real feeling in them. Yet she felt that she must let him know that he was blameless in her eyes before he could say anything farther to her. She did not dare to reflect on what he might be about to say. She only knew that there was a tension in the air that oppressed her.

The Ranger shook his head with a little frown of puzzlement.

"I know," he said simply. "I suppose it does seem silly and superfluous to you. It does to me, now. But it used to be a very strong conviction, while now I don't seem to regard it as very serious. Yet, if it wasn't, I've made an awful ass of myself!"

"You haven't!" she cried indignantly. "Of course it was terrible to you and you brooded over it. But that was because you are so much finer and more sensitive. And that doctor explained it all, so that any one would know that you were not to blame."

The Ranger, whose face had lit up wonderfully, suddenly frowned again.

"The doctor!" he repeated. "*He* had it that I was locoed or batty or something. Now that's a sweet thing to have happen to a fellow! I'd as soon be guilty as crazy."

"I won't *have* you say such things!" said Helen. "*Oh!* You do make me so furious, sometimes!"

She stamped her foot and glared at him as fiercely as her beauty permitted, while he looked on at this sudden eruption of temper, for which he could not at all account, with utter bewilderment. But Helen only knew that he *wouldn't* see how it hurt her to have even himself say such things, and she was beyond analyzing the tempestuous feeling that had swept her.

"Why!" said the Ranger, and looked at her again. "Why! what difference——"

But she was trembling and on the verge of tears and had turned away from him a little so that he should not see what was in her face. As he looked at her, a half incredulous and frightened expression came upon his own countenance and he stepped to her side. She made as if to fall back, but he caught her arm.

"WHAT difference does it make to you?" he said, his voice a little hoarse so that it sounded harsh. "Why should you care?"

"Don't!" said Helen feebly, all her anger gone in a panic that was somehow half delightful.

"If you care," said the Ranger, "then I want to tell you that I've lain up on that Mountain by day and night for months with the dream of you torturing me more than any regret for anything I ever did! I've ridden those hills with the hoofs of my horse beating out your name against the rocks and I've talked in the loneliness like a crazy hermit to that mousehound even, telling him what you are to me. I don't care any more whether I was cursed by that woman or not; I don't care whether I am black or white, stained or immaculate!

"I only care for you and for the love of you! I am talking like a melodramatic fool, no doubt, but it is a fact that I want you as I never wanted anything in earth or heaven and that if I can not have you and your respect, I can not have any light in my life. I love you!"

Helen pulled against his grasp.

"Don't!" she said again. "You—you know that I respect you!"

"I was a liar," he said, and grasped her tighter. "I want more than your respect, dear! I want your love and I want *you!* And I'll have to have them. I can't live without you and you've got to love me."

Helen felt the inexorable strength drawing her closer and covered her face with her hands.

"I—can't!" she gasped. "You don't remember! I'm not fit to have you love me! You don't know what shameful things they say of me!"

The Ranger caught her other arm and drew her a little closer. His voice was as she had never heard it before, but she knew that his eyes were exultant and arrogant, as they had been a few moments before. He

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was swept out of all that depth of humility and self-reproach that had buried him so long. He was again the demigod of the old nurse's imagining. And she felt a thrill of joy that it should be so. For what was a man if he was not bold and confident?

"Let any one raise a voice against you if they dare to!" he cried. "What do we care! Not a person living will raise an eyebrow when you are my wife! I'll see to that, and I'd like to hear the man that will open his mouth about you except in praise. You are mine—mine, and there isn't a man living that can say a word against you."

Helen was drawn gently but inevitably toward him until, her face still bent down into her hands, she felt her forehead come into contact with his shoulder. The blue-jerseyed arms were about her and their iron strength was more comforting than she had ever imagined anything could be.

"Look up! Look up, dear!"

It was almost a whisper, yet it seemed as if there were a song in the syllables.

"I—I can't," murmured Helen.

"*Don't* you love me?" and she knew that he felt no doubt.

"What a question!" she answered; and then, as she slowly bent her head back, the hands that she lowered from her face crept, almost without her volition, upward across his shoulders and she saw his browned countenance bending over her, in his eyes the glad light of love and pride and joy. She shut her own and turned her mouth up to him. The earth fell away from them as they kissed.

There is no account of time taken under such circumstances as these. Poor Mr. Beran, gentle and uncomplaining, must face the prospect of a meal totally at the mercy of the Mexican servant, for his daughter had forgotten that she had a father as she sat with the Ranger in her office and talked of the same things over and over again. The time flew by, but they did not care. What was time or space to these two? They had risen out of the material world; they never even heard the mousehound whining outside the door.

A man who shouted lashed a horse past the gateway, but they did not know that he had ridden by as if he carried news of moment. Later, a number of men from the Strawberry Settlement tore past in the other direction, but neither did that fact make an impression upon them. It was not until Bill McGhie came to the door and pounded on it that they came back to the drab world of their primitive surroundings where tragedy was more prevalent than romance.

Bill came in with a face that was dark with ill news.

"Dave Lane," he said in answer to the mute question of their eyes. "He's been drinkin' like a fish since the trial, an' today he was cussin' Miss Helen and the Bishop who's reported his polygamy. He's in bad, an' threatened with arrest an' when he cursed the Bishop he got knocked down. Then he shot Jensen."

"Oh!" said Helen. "And what did they do to him?"

"The whole neighborhood is ridin' to catch him. But there ain't much chance. He took Forbes's hoss and I reckon there ain't nothin' here that can leg it to keep him in sight. He's clean gone, and the old man is cussin' like he was plumb loco and blamin' it all on Jensen."

"Rather on me," wailed Helen. "It was my fault."

The Ranger was frowning.

"When did Forbes come back?" he asked.

"He come here with Dave not more than a week ago. But Moroni quarreled with him, and Forbes has been stoppin' at Springer's. Him and Dave has been soakin' it up together. Forbes is down and out, they say."

"What is he doing here?"

"Allows he's goin' to hunt and go in with Dave in the sheep business later. He looks seedy."

"If the horse was fit to ride yet!" the Ranger muttered to himself. "But he isn't. Helen—" there was a note of command in his voice as if he was consciously the master already—"if he isn't caught you've got to stay around the ranch. He's half crazed and likely to lay for you."

"He won't be caught on that hoss," said Bill, gloomily.

Nor was he.

CHAPTER XXV

FORBES GOES HUNTING

IT SEEMED that Forbes had been with Dave over at the Verde for two or three days, following an acrimonious dispute between old Moroni—who, since the disastrous outcome of the scheme to gain possession of

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Beran's ranch had hated Forbes with all the fervor of his unbalanced nature—and his son, who rather followed than was led by the Prescott man. Both had been drinking heavily and had returned to the village with supplies for a continued celebration. They had dismounted at the post-office and tied their horses while they went in to that clearing-house of news and gossip.

While Dave was conversing wildly and drunkenly and aiming his invectives against Helen, Bishop Jensen had come in and at once expressed the general opinion of the community that the conduct of the Lanes had passed all bounds and would be no longer tolerated among the Latter Day Saints. Words flew hotly, for the Viking blood of the Bishop was hot, and they had culminated in a blow. There had followed the swift tragedy of attempted murder, and Dave, with his victim lying on the floor and the group in confusion, had easily escaped to the horses and seized Forbes's swift beast on which to flee.

Confusion gave him a good start and the fact that Jensen was not killed but only badly wounded contributed to his winning safely away, for the Mormons were more intent on ministering to the young cleric than in running down his assailant. It was not long before the Ranger and Helen were on the spot. The girl went in to help minister to the man who had been hurt in defense of her, while the Ranger, with a force and authority that later caused remark among the men, took charge of the pursuit of the fugitive.

Men were sent to Myrtle and Showlow to raise the country, and the infrequent trails to the top of the Mountain were guarded as quickly as men could be posted. At Payson the posses were out to see that he did not go toward the south and Globe.

Yet all these precautions were unavailing. It was true that, without a miracle, the man could not win to the fastnesses of Lost Eden, but the longer the search continued the more certain it became that he had swept along the Rim eastward, passing Myrtle before the warning reached there, and had gotten safely to the wild country of the Blue River, where the settlements were largely occupied by outlaws.

And this event contained a new element of uneasiness. It would be out of the question to maintain a cordon on the Mountain for more than a few days, and when the hue and cry had died down there was nothing to prevent the fugitive from slipping across the wilderness of the Mogollons which lay between the Blue River and Lost Eden and gaining the safety of that jungle refuge of desperate men. And Lost Eden was within perilous striking distance of the village and Helen.

There had been complications which would have been somewhat amusing if the subject had not been so serious. Forbes had sworn that he would have value for his stolen horse and had uttered threats against the whole Lane family. Moroni, wildly defending his son, had gloated on the fact that he had gone away on Forbes's horse and had told Forbes to whistle for the value of the animal. He seemed to regard the theft and the crime as legitimate methods of spoiling the Egyptian, and to mingle his triumph at the successful flight and the lifting of the horse with his anger that they should hunt his offspring.

He escaped the resentment of the villagers because they still had a great deal of respect for his standing in the community—a standing which pertained more to his years than to his personality. Yet most of the natives were reluctant to believe that Moroni himself had been guilty of wrongdoing, and placed the blame for the recent troubles almost wholly upon the shoulders of Forbes and Dave. But Moroni fiercely resented any hint that Dave was to blame and laid every bit of the sin to Forbes's credit. Forbes retaliated by exposing frankly every action of the old man with which he was acquainted that would reflect discredit upon him, but most of the natives gave him little credit.

Avoided by them all, and no more popular with the Gentiles of the Verde Valley, where unlimited liquor was to be had, Forbes remained in the neighborhood and sought such company and relaxation as he might find. There are always people of instincts and tastes which lead them to associate with the outcast and immoral, and Forbes had a following of young men who rather prided themselves on defying the conventions and associating with a character whose record was sinister.

It may be imagined that Forbes had little contact with the Ranger in these days. That young man spent his spare time at the Beran ranch and seldom appeared in the village. Forbes intended to set up as a

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lawyer, but seemed in no hurry to do so. He amused himself in his own way and, when all other resources failed him, went hunting in the hills around the valley.

Finally he determined to spend a week up on the Mountain and hunt there in defiance of the Ranger. At any rate he arranged to go up without a party and camp on the Ranger's District. He engaged a half-witted old fellow named Breck who, as a boy, had once been lost in the hills and had ever since had an abiding fear of them, to go along and take care of his camp and do the cooking, for Forbes was lazy. Breck took a deal of persuading, but when Forbes had solemnly sworn that he would not be required to leave the tent and that he would be carefully guarded at all times, he consented.

They took the precaution to drive around, thirty miles out of their way, to Myrtle and ascend the Mountain by a little-used and difficult road, coming over a roundabout route to Drayton's Spring, which lies half way between Lost Eden and the branching cañons at the head of East Clear Creek. Thus the Ranger knew nothing of all this until they had been installed in their camp for two or three days.

THE rainy season had come and gone, being an unusually short one even for Arizona. It was now early in September, and the business of the Reserve was moving on at full tide, or as full as such slender business could be.

For some days the Ranger had been engaged in breaking the great sorrel, and had reached the point where he could ride the brute quite readily, though it still showed fear and ferocity where any one but himself was concerned. His riding had been done near the Buckhorn, over toward the west, where the barren hills were open and free from *mal pais*. This was a task which permitted no idle roamings of the mind, as any one who has ever ridden a broncho may tell you.

At the end of several days, during which the hectic beast preyed on the Ranger's nerves, he dragged himself into his dingy cabin with profound gratitude to a merciful Providence that he had been permitted to tame that fiend without the loss of limb or life. It was with considerable exercise of will power that he essayed to cook his dinner. And while he was about it a stranger rode up whom the Ranger cursed under his breath.

Aside from the Rangers, Dave Lane, a few hunters and one or two cowpunchers who habitually rode alone, hardly any of the men who were to be encountered on the Reserve wore guns. The fashion was rapidly dying out in Arizona. The Ranger was, therefore, inclined to surprise that the stranger should wear not one, but two, ugly forty-fives sagging on his thighs.

In addition, the holsters were bound to his legs by straps running around them. This, with a certain restlessness of eye, inclined the Ranger to an unfavorable opinion. However, he knew the limits of his business. With no sign of his curiosity he invited the man to share his supper. The invitation was quietly accepted.

When the stranger entered the cabin he walked across to the opposite wall and took his seat, facing the door. Taking his cue from this, when he had his meal prepared, the Ranger dragged the table out and placed the bench on the side toward him. Then he took his own place, not opposite, for he had no desire to have belligerent people firing guns across him, but to one side. The man watched the preparations with some suspicion, but as the Ranger waved him to his seat with a shadowy smile, he also grinned and dropped one eyelid.

The two-gun man ate in silence, broken only by an occasional impersonal remark. The Ranger was equally taciturn and strictly forebore to evince curiosity concerning the sinister figure. At the end of the meal the man thanked him briefly and strode out to his horse after lighting a cigarette. Then he paused.

"Say," he remarked, "are you the party that *lobo* named Forbes is gunning for?"

"I reckon so," returned the Ranger. "At least I have heard murmurs emanating from his direction."

"Thought maybe you'd like to know that he's campin' this side of Kell's Cañon with an old natural. They're in Jones' old claim near the Spring. Passed 'em today."

"Thanks," said the Ranger. "I'll know where to look."

"You be'n pretty white and I'm glad to help you any. Say, if any horse police wander past, I hope you got a short memory."

"The only thing I can ever remember, when I see a Territorial Ranger," remarked the Ranger, "is that I never did like his

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breed. It's plumb remarkable how I forget everything else."

The man grinned and picked up his reins.

"Just a minute," said the Ranger. "In case you should have happened to have been squandering around Lost Eden lately, I'd appreciate knowing if you have run on to any signs of a fellow with a thoroughbred horse." He went on to describe Dave Lane pretty accurately.

The rider shook his head.

"Of course I ain't none familiar and intimate with this here Lost Eden," he said, "but I ain't heard of no such party thereaways, though he *might* be there, me bein' ignorant about them things, thataway."

As he rode away the Ranger knew that he had been entertaining an outlaw with a price upon his head, but his relief from the anxiety caused by Lane's possible proximity to Helen made him disregard this fact. He had no intention of betraying the man if there had been any use in doing so, but his gratitude for the news the outlaw had given would have prevented him if he had had such intention. He knew Lost Eden vaguely and knew that an outlaw, once in that jungle of ferns and spruce and fir, was safe from all pursuit. If Dave had been in the famous refuge Helen would have been in constant peril from that source. But it was sure that he was not there, since this man had not seen or heard of him.

It was part of his duties to see that all campers conformed to the Forest Regulations, and the Ranger, though he disliked to intrude upon Forbes, had no intention of shirking his tasks. So the next day he took occasion, while riding to the east, to swing on his homeward way into the valley that harbored the campers. He came down from the surrounding ridge and rode up to a dirty tent before he saw signs of life. As his horse paused before the fly, the wizened head of the old imbecile, Breck, protruded from the flaps.

"Say, Breck, you're a long way from home," said the Ranger. "I thought you were afraid of the mountains?"

"Yeah," replied the man, "but I ain't a-goin' out o' sight o' this tent. I'm plumb skeered o' these mountings. I tell *you*, I kin hear the 'loafers' every night. But they ain't a-goin' to ketch *me!*"

"Well, better be careful," warned the Ranger. "There's worse than *lobos* about. I saw cat tracks on East Clear Creek a day or so ago that never were made by a mountain lion unless he was as big as a whale. If you ask me, I think some *tigre** has wandered this way from beyond the Chiricahuas and is plumb likely to drop on you if you get near him. So you'd better not wander around."

"I ain't a-roamin', none whatever," asserted Breck. "I'm goin' to camp right here. Dick, he's gone out to get a mess of pigeons with the shotgun. Did you want to see him?"

"No, not at all," replied the Ranger. "Well, so long, and don't forget to cover your fires. It's getting a heap dry."

At this moment the mousehound, which had been lagging somewhere in the rear, arrived; and, seeing a stranger, rushed upon him with that excess of affection for which that remarkable beast was famous. Breck did not understand this, however, and fled into the tent with a cry of dismay, leaving the injured and puzzled dog to bark a protest outside the flaps. The Ranger laughed and rode away.

SEVERAL days went by, like those of the week before and those of the weeks to follow—dry, hot and cloudless. During the long rides on his nervous,

**Tigre*, or "tiger," is the Spanish-American name for the spotted jaguar, the largest of American cats. The range of this animal is commonly not farther north than the Chiricahua Mountains, but it has been known occasionally to wander as far north as the Mogollons. The great gray timber wolf is known as a *lobo*, and the *v* sound of the *b* lends itself to the common Arizona corruption, "loafer." At the period of this story, about 1904-05, the *lobos* were quite common on the Black Mesa, and were not comfortable neighbors.

The Ranger's derogatory remark concerning the Territorial Rangers, or mounted police, is explainable if regard is had to the fact that originally these men were recruited from the "gunmen" themselves and had bad reputations for brutality and a disposition to kill on inadequate grounds. The prejudice among stockmen in the outlying districts still remains, and perhaps the members of the force deliberately encourage it from a feeling of perversity, though it is generally acknowledged that they are, in the main, a fearless and efficient force. The writer certainly noticed such feeling and, perhaps, felt it himself without any reason except environment and prejudice.

Thus, also, one may account for the fact that the Ranger regarded it as none of his business when the outlaw comes to his cabin. That was the affair of the Territorials, and *his* work required him not to meddle with it. This feeling has gone from the Forest Force, I believe, but under the old *régime* it was noticeable.

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half-wild horse, the Ranger regretted at times the sodden hours of the short rainy season, uncomfortable as they had been. The parched, baking hills irritated his nerves. Down in the cañons, even, the streams were running dry and though the gullies were still muddy and pools of water stood in them at intervals, none flowed over the clay and pebbles of the *arroyos*.

But it was the Ranger's duty to watch the campers on his District, and, unpleasant as was the task, he rode one morning over toward Forbes's camp to see that his warning as to fires had been heeded. Toward noon he rode up to the tent and hailed loudly. At first he thought that it was deserted, though a camp-fire smoldered outside.

But after a bit the canvas flaps were cautiously parted and Breck's scared face looked forth. The man was a sight. Abject terror and misery had lined and creased his already wrinkled face. His eyes were wild and bloodshot. He had, apparently, slept little in several days.

"What's the matter?" asked the Ranger, dismounting.

"Thank the Lord!" he quavered. "Oh, I'm skeered! I'm skeered, sir!"

"What are you afraid of?" demanded the Ranger sharply. "Here, take a brace and tell me what's happened. Where's Forbes?"

"I don't know—I don't know!" Breck wailed. "I've be'n here all alone. I'm skeered, I tell you!"

"You don't need to tell me that," said the Ranger. "What's the matter then? Why are you alone?"

"I don't know," he repeated stupidly. "Dick, he never come back. I be'n here 'most a week alone. I'm skeered!"

"Oh, stop your bawling!" The Ranger grew suddenly impatient. "You haven't been eaten up. Why didn't you come out to Long Valley and tell me this?"

"I'd git lost," shuddered Breck. "I ain't goin' outa sight o' this tent, nohow. Dick, he ain't never come back. Them 'loafers' skeers me all night and I ain't slept none!"

"How long has Forbes been gone?" asked the Ranger. "I was over here a few days ago. He'd gone after pigeons, you said."

"Yeah," said Breck. "He never come back sence."

"Did he take a horse?"

"No, he walked. Them 'loafers' done e't him up, I know."

"Do you know if he took his rifle or pistol?"

"No, they're hangin' in the tent."

"Here!" said the Ranger after some thought, "you pull that tent down and get your stuff together. Now where are your horses?"

Breck waved his hand vaguely toward the side hills. The Ranger rode over the hill and quartered up and down until he found the horses, which had not strayed far from the spring. He rounded them up and drove them in. Forbes had a wagon, which was soon loaded and the horses hitched.

Breck was bidden to climb in and drive after the Ranger to the latter's camp. After the Ranger had kicked him several times the old man gathered enough courage to obey his order. Weeping, sniveling, reiterating monotonously that he was "skeered," the idiot was led on the rough trail to the cabin.

Breck, repeatedly cross-examined, seemed to have no slightest idea of where Forbes had intended going. There were pigeons in nearly any place where water was to be found, so that his avowed intention of shooting birds indicated little. The great spot for pigeons was notoriously at Pivot Rock. This, however, not only lay beyond the Ranger's camp, to the west, but he had come past it the day before and had seen no sign of life there. And, too, Forbes would certainly not have gone all the way to Pivot Rock on foot.

The Ranger's duty was plain. If Breck could have been induced to go to Pine alone and give the alarm, he would at once have begun a search for the missing man. But Breck refused positively to stir out of the Ranger's sight, so "skeered" was he of being lost, and so it was necessary that the Forester take him to the village and rouse the settlement himself. Breck could not or would not drive so the young man climbed into the seat and drove, after tying his horse to the rear axle of the wagon.

The road was a poor apology, and the grades very heavy and frequent. Rocks projected from the ruts, and where there were no rocks there were holes of depth and width. The wagon was old and rickety, resembling the passenger in that respect. But neither grades, rocks, holes nor feebleness deterred the Ranger. He was out to break a record, and if the horses stood up he proposed to do it. Over the boulders he drove at a gallop, Breck shrieking with

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fright and jouncing painfully on the rough seat. While on the level ridge where the going was fairly good the Ranger stood behind the dash and yelled as he wielded the whip. Soon they struck a steep pitch.

"Put on the brake!" yelled Breck.

"Brake nothing!" grated the Ranger. "The brake is busted. Whoop! Let her out, you snails!"

They crashed down the slope, rocking, plunging and lurching giddily. The Ranger's horse could bless himself for his wild upbringing; for, without the catlike quickness of foot it had given him, he would have had his neck broken a dozen times. Breck moaned Mormon invocations to Adam and all the other gods, to Joseph Smith, Moroni, Mormon, Nephi and Brigham Young. They may have been effective. At any rate the wagon held together and won safely to the opposite slope. The horses plunged recklessly up this, but were stopped at the top by a horseman who drew across the road in amazement. It was a cowpuncher from the camp of Verde men who were conducting a *rodeo* at the north of the Ranger's District.

The Ranger hailed him. "Forbes is lost," he called. "He's been gone nearly four days. Ride to your camp, will you, and turn the boys out to help search. He was afoot and couldn't have gone far."

He added the location of the camp. The man asked a few rapid questions and galloped away on his errand. On the flat ridge once more the Ranger urged the horses on again and drove as hard as they could stand until they reached the pitch down the Rim to the valley. Down this he had to drive with greater caution, but it is doubtful if any team ever descended that road in much better time. At times they traveled on two wheels and at almost any instant a stumble would have meant a wreck. But Moroni, Adam and Nephi looked after them well, if old Breck's prayers had any effect, and they came out whole at the bottom.

At Beran's ranch the Ranger drew up and leaped out. His horse was snorting and plunging at the end of its tether and he had great difficulty in untying it. He ordered Breck, on pain of an awful fate, to drive on to Pine and rouse the settlers. As the bewildered old man drove away, Helen came from the house to watch anxiously the Ranger's efforts at controlling the frenzied horse.

"What is the matter?" Helen inquired.

"Nothing," he panted. "Where's Bill?"

"He's at the Verde, getting supplies. What *is* it?"

"Forbes is lost on the Mountain," he replied. "Where is your father?"

"I thought some one was after you," said Helen with relief. Forbes's fate aroused little sympathy in her. "I'm glad he's lost and I hope nobody finds him. I hope a wolf bites him!"

"He probably has been by this time," said the Ranger. "He must have gotten hurt and been lying out there for days—unless he has been killed."

Helen's mood changed at once.

"Poor fellow!" she murmured.

"Your father will be wanted," said the Ranger. "He'd better bring a wagon and some food up there, as the men will need supplies. Will you tell him?"

"I'll do more than that," she said with sudden determination. "I'm going up, too, to help. I can cook and help around the camp."

"I guess you'll have Miss Petersen to help you," said the Ranger. "Well, I must be off."

He checked his horse into a second's helpless quiescence and leaped to the saddle. The brute shook his head from the cramped position and sunk it swiftly to his knees. The great back arched stiffly and for several minutes there was a pandemonium of plunging horse and swaying man who clung to the perilous seat like a leech. At last the great head was dragged up and the sorrel leaped under the spur and dashed frantically away down the road.

Helen had uttered a single cry when the fierce battle began and then had stood like a frozen woman. But the Ranger laughed exultantly and never heeded the tremor he had given her for the moment.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SEARCH—DAVE AGAIN

IT WAS far into the night before the searchers from Pine, led by the Ranger, arrived at the camp in Long Valley, where they were compelled to camp and wait for another day. The first to arrive had been the Ranger, on his tireless sorrel. Just behind him Beran drove a sheep wagon, beside which Helen rode. They found a half

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dozen young cowpunchers from the Verde there who exchanged opinions with the Ranger and Beran as to the fate of the missing man. Later, as the straggling Mormons rode in, a great deal of theorizing was indulged in. But among the men an undercurrent of suspicion seemed to indicate that these speculations were mere dissimulation. The general opinion seemed to be that Hyatt could explain the matter if he would, though there were some who intimated that Dave Lane might be accountable. Breck, it seemed, had met Miss Petersen at the store and while excitedly telling the story of his "skeer" to such men as were there, had heard her strident voice among those of the listeners.

"That there Ranger knew Forbes had gone out! And he had it in for him! I bet you Forbes ain't *lost* none! I bet that Ranger knows where he is!" Breck grasped at the suspicion eagerly. Forbes had often advertised his enmity to the Ranger.

"That Ranger done made trouble for Dick down to Prescott, he told me," he shrilled, "and they sure hated each other a plenty. I bet that's it! I seen he looked on the fight when he rid up, that day. Soon's I told him where Forbes had went he up and racked outa there. He was wearin' a gun, too, and he looked plumb fierce."

The Mormons were not disposed to regard this as unlikely. Few of them cared for Forbes, but there were one or two of his partizans who murmured their suspicions against the Ranger. Now, around the camp-fires, he sensed it and felt that these men would look rather for evidence against himself than for the missing man. The Gentile cowpunchers, hostile to Mormons as they were, accepted in some degree the opinion of the majority, though they were not in the least inimical to the forester. They seemed, rather, to sympathize with him and inclined to joke about his supposed crime.

"I reckon," said one, "that we ain't a-goin' to do nothin' but help to bury Forbes. Why didn't you plant him, Ranger, and save us the trouble?"

"You're as funny as the smallpox," said the Ranger.

BUT as a two-day search on the Mountain revealed no sign of the missing man, and as every likely or unlikely spot seemed to have been ransacked without result, on the eve of the third day the cowboys prepared to return to their interrupted *rodeo* while the Mormons packed to abandon the search. It was evident to all that Forbes had not unexpectedly left the country, since to do so on foot, with a shotgun and no food, would have argued him an imbecile. Necessarily, too, he could not have gone south through Payson, north to Flagstaff or Winslow, east through Showlow or Blue River, or west through Camp Verde without being noticed.

Since, then, he could not have left nor could his body be found, the conclusion was, obviously, that it had been disposed of in some way. The disposer, in the opinion of the settlers, was either the Ranger or Dave Lane. But nobody cared particularly what became of Forbes, and the sole result of the affair was to make the Mormons a little suspicious and distrustful of the Ranger. Those who did not like him made the episode a foundation of accusations and hints regarding his character, and among these old Moroni Lane was the most prominent and vociferous.

Indeed, it gradually became apparent that the old man was obsessed with a conviction that every evil that had ever befallen himself and his family was directly traceable to Hyatt's influence. It was becoming a mania with him, and the continued absence of news from Dave rankled in his enfeebled and vindictive mind until he was disposed to imagine that the Ranger had actually been the cause and instigator of all that had happened to that fugitive.

He pictured his son as lying, spent and dying, on the desert, driven there by the plotting and hounding of the Ranger. He mourned the decline and wreck of his own fortunes and unhesitatingly ascribed his financial disasters to the same agency. He turned to Hilda in his lonely hatred and found her a good second to his mania, for the girl hated Helen with a deadly hate and knew that Helen's weak spot lay in her love for the Range Rider. Therefore she was only too willing to feed and fan the flame of Moroni's hate and direct it in the path of revenge.

Helen and the Ranger could have left this atmosphere and gone together out to the wider life they were to finally lead together, but both of them had a certain pride in completing a task which they had begun. Helen vowed that she would close

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the season on the rejuvenated ranch and see the last sheep off the Mountain before she went away, while the Ranger wished to complete his term and leave his post in good order. It was settled that they would be married in the Fall, after the sheep were off the Mountain and the work of the year suspended for the Winter snows.

Week after week of baking weather followed, during which the Ranger had little time to do anything but ride incessantly, patrolling the ridges against possible fires. The scattered sheep camps and those of the men who hunted on the Mountain were all danger points. Fires had even been known to start from the friction of dry limbs rubbing against each other during high winds.

September waned and October lagged by, with days as hot and fiercely bright as ever. But now the nights were growing longer and the evening chill of high altitudes was giving place to an iron chill that spoke of approaching Winter. The Ranger often dropped his rope in the well and noted the falling water that gave mute evidence of the drought. The very pines began to grow yellow. The riders of the Mountain spoke of it, calling attention to the unusual length and severity of the dry season. Trees were even noticed that had died of no perceptible cause beyond lack of moisture. This, in a bull pine, which is notably drought resistant, was a phenomenon that caused the Ranger some uneasiness.

The grass lost its greenness long before the first frost and grew yellow and brittle. The spring at Drayton's claim dribbled down to a mere thread of water, though it was considered to be perpetual. Only that at Pivot Rock and the stagnant "tanks" of foul water offered any considerable supply of moisture. The *rodeo* was hurried through and the gathered cattle driven to the lower country, while the sheepmen spoke of getting off earlier than usual.

November set in and the nights grew colder, while even in daytime there was a chill in the air. The Ranger rode in a buckskin tunic now, for the winds were often biting. He began to consider moving his camp to Pivot Rock, where the water supply was certain and where the sheep must pass when they were driven to the desert.

All this time there was no sign or word of Dave Lane or of Forbes. Moroni sat at home, while his men attended to the remnant of his sheep, and cursed at length all who had had a hand in the fate of his son.

At last the sheep were moving, going off the forest to the Winter range on the desert. The Ranger rode day after day from the camp which he at last established in a teepee tent at Pivot Rock, to check off the trampling flocks, keeping them within the mile-wide trail and squabbling with the Mexican and Basque herders. The cloudless sky which had been so persistent for months gave way to one overcast each morning with fleecy clouds which generally faded during the day. Each morning they banked in the north with a hint of threat, but the snow held off and the wind blew gently as yet, while the hurrying teamsters who carted freight across the Mountain from Flagstaff took yet another chance and made the trip before the snow could catch them.

When the last woolly imbecile and the final cursing herder had been escorted to the Reserve boundary and were well on their way toward the lower valleys, the Ranger had still a longer wait to try his patience, though he turned back to his camp with the feeling that his actual tasks were over for the year. There had come an imploring letter from the Supervisor, who had told him that the Ranger who rode the District east of his own and was the only man of the Forest Force that could be reached in time of danger, had resigned and that there was no one to guard more than a thousand square miles of forest but himself; that, too, in a time of such unprecedented drought that need of men was imperative and disaster unavoidable if he could not stay until the snow put an end to the danger.

The Ranger sighed, consulted Helen, who bravely told him to stay, and wrote that he would remain. He hoped that it would not be long. He was uneasy about the girl, for there was nothing to keep her in the settlement any longer and he still feared that Lane might appear. This fear was made certainty not long after.

HE HAD ridden down to the village to see Helen, as he did at frequent intervals. There had come news from Prescott and Baker. The latter wished that some one would come to Flagstaff, where he was soon to go, and make all arrangements for the stock that was to

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be run on the Mountain next year. Bill might have gone, but the Ranger intimated that he would prefer that Helen do so and she acquiesced after a little demur, on the promise that he would follow her as soon as he could possibly do so, which must be within a week or two. Having his mail to send in he then rode on to the village with some relief at the thought that Helen would soon be out of danger.

In front of the post-office were two men whose carbines, six-shooters and badges proclaimed them as being members of the hard-riding and hard-fighting mounted police of Arizona, the Territorial Rangers.

The Ranger, who had the prejudice of the stockman and the United States officer against the force, remembered that visitor who had once come to his cabin. "Who are you after?" he asked the nearest man.

"A two-gun man," replied the officer. "Have you-all caught sight of one, hereaways?"

"What kind of a two-gun man?" asked the Ranger. "Am I supposed to know all the gun fighters in Arizona? If I am I'll have to enlarge my acquaintance among you shorthorns."

"Well, that ain't by no means unlikely," retorted the man, "if what I hear concernin' you and a fellow named Forbes is true. Don't get to pitchin' none because you work for Uncle Sam. I'd as soon run you in as any one."

"Oh, go and kill a squaw!" snorted the Ranger. "That's more like your speed."

"I've a notion to take you in anyway," said the officer. "It'd do you a heap of good. If we wasn't after this other fellow I'd admire to do it."

"Better go and catch the other fellow first. There's a two-gun man in Lost Eden, or was a few weeks ago. Go in there and get him."

"Can you show us the way?"

"I can show the way to the edge," replied Hyatt, with his slow smile. "Further than that I don't aim to go for all the line police this side of Tophet. The deadline is about twenty feet inside the dense timber. What's beyond it is a whole lot unexplored so far as I'm concerned."

"You ain't got a lot of sand, have you?" sneered the other.

"No," admitted the Ranger, "but I've got a heap of sense. If you're so long on sand, leave me your address and I'll send word to your heirs. They may want to have you buried."

"I reckon it'll be after they hang you-all for killin' Forbes," the officer retorted, in no way offended. "I reckon they'll have you on the inside lookin' out before I get back this way."

"They'd better not send any Greaser-potting line police to put me there," asserted the Ranger, "or they'll likely have to pay hospital bills."

The man grinned and rode after his companion, turning to make a last remark.

"I reckon that fellow you spoke of ain't the one we're after," he said. "This one can't have been up here more than a day or two."

"Who is it?" called the Ranger.

"Fellow by the name o' Lane," replied the officer. "We trailed him out o' Blue River over this way. Same that shot the Bishop up here."

The Ranger stared after the retreating rider as if in a trance. For some time he seemed incapable of moving until a hand was laid on his arm.

"What did them riders say?" whispered Hilda Petersen in his ear.

"Say!" repeated the Ranger. "Didn't you hear him?"

"It's Dave they're after, ain't it?"

The Ranger nodded, and Hilda dropped his arm with a snicker of derision.

"They ain't a-goin' to catch him," she asserted. "They ain't no use to look fer him. Them fellows better come back here and run you in for killin' Forbes. I don't care, though. If they don't get you I will, and that hussy up to Beran's, too."

The Ranger turned and looked at the malignant woman thoughtfully.

"Now, will you?" he mused. "I wonder if you actually will!"

"Keep right on wonderin'," said Hilda. "Some of these days you'll be wonderin' how it happened instead of will it happen."

"Perhaps you're right," sighed the Ranger. "That being the case, I think I will get away from your vicinity while I can. Good-by!" Hilda blasphemed him out of hearing in a burst of wild rage.

But the Ranger kept his suspicions to himself and stopped at the Beran ranch to speak to Helen as if nothing had happened.

"I think you had better start to Flagstaff tomorrow," he told her. "It is going to snow within three or four days and the

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trip will be dangerous then. You might get drifted in and not be able to get out until Spring."

"I had about made up my mind to go at once," she agreed.

This seemed to please him a great deal, but it did not please her that he should ride away again without any exchange of the sort she had lately come to anticipate and enjoy. She was a little uneasy and depressed after he had gone.

BOTH of them would have been far more uneasy if they had known that only eighteen hours before a horseman, dusty and unkempt and furtive, had ridden into the ranch of old Moroni Lane and led his horse carefully out of sight into the stables. The horse alone would have frightened them, for it was a beautiful beast such as they would have recognized at once as the thoroughbred of Richard Forbes, sometime member of the law firm of Forbes & Meadows.

And the rider would have been no mystery to them either, in spite of the fact that he was no longer as he had been a few short months before. His face was hard and worn, his clothes were rough and dusty, his boots were turned at the heel and rusty where the stirrup leathers had rubbed them. On his waist hung two weapons, and there was a bulge in the front of his shirt which perhaps indicated still another. It was Dave.

And a little later this man sat at a table with Moroni Lane and Hilda and joined them in full-bodied curses directed at the Ranger and at Helen. The latter was Dave's especial target, and Hilda was hardly less bitter. But she and Moroni had many a hard word for the Ranger also, and Dave was willing to extend his left-handed blessings to that quarter as well.

The Ranger had humiliated Dave Lane, and the latter's wife and father would gladly have his blood. Dave would like to kill the Ranger, but most of all he wished to wreak his will on Helen, who had scorned him. The Ranger! A shot in the dark would settle him.

In the dark night, since there seemed to be no sign of pursuit, they sat on the stoop and discussed means of satisfying the hate of the three. Many a plan was broached, but few seemed practical. Finally Dave lit a cigarette and threw the match into a bunch of dry grass. It flared up like tinder and then went out.

"He, he," chuckled old Moroni suddenly. "'They shall go away into the lake of fire and brimstone, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched, which is their torment.' I reckon the Lord has blessed us an' will be with us in the day o' tribulations."

"What are you talkin' about?" growled Dave.

"The timber on the Mountain is dyin' o' drouth," said Moroni. "There ain't been, in the memory o' man, sich a dry time as we've had. The woods will burn like grass, and the Lord of Zion has shown the way to his vengeance."

"And the whole village will go up to fight it, leavin' the girl behind," added Dave. "I wouldn't wonder if this devil of yours hasn't given you a pretty good idea, father."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE END OF DICK FORBES

THE Ranger knew real and heartfelt relief when he stood beside the light buckboard on the following day and bade old Mr. Beran and Helen farewell. When they had driven off toward the crossing of the Verde road—whence their path led up the settled valley of Beaver Creek, where there was no danger of outlaws intruding—he breathed a long draft that lifted a load from his mind. Pine was fast getting to be no place for Helen, what with vindictive fanatics and desperate criminals at large.

The Ranger turned his horse back to the pathless forest and smiled as he thought that the snow would soon begin to fall and his furlough begin. Meantime there were bear tracks in East Clear Creek, and as that was a region he had not ridden for many days he decided to go over there and investigate on the chance of getting a skin.

The forest was denser in this direction. It was not until he rode out upon the rocky ridges bordering the fan of gulches that merged in the main creek farther north that the Ranger could see much of his surroundings. During the search for Forbes he had not reached this section, as it was covered by some of the Mormons. He noted that, owing to the heavier vegetation, the effects of the drought had not yet appeared so plainly here, but as he crept down the steep

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slopes and slid over sharp, sandy pitches and rocky ledges to the narrow, level bottom of the gorge, the ground bore evidence of thirst and the stream bed was quite dry and caked where clay showed between the sand and rocks.

The bear tracks that the Mormons had seen were by no means the only ones that were apparent. The Ranger was soon aware that there was a beast of imposing presence in the vicinity, or had been within a few days. He followed huge and comparatively fresh tracks, not more than a few days old, and went with caution, lest the maker of them should not yet have taken to Winter quarters and should come upon him unawares.

In passing a steep cleft that ran into the main cañon at right angles, he perceived a footprint in the hardened clay of the floor. It was old, evidently having been made when the ground was damp. Up and down the main cañon were plenty of horse tracks, some of them no doubt made by those who had raked the gorge in search of Lane. But no track of a horse ran into the gulch where the shoe of a man had pressed.

"This is bigger game than bear," muttered the Ranger. He could not trust his restive horse in the face of a possible bruin, so he dismounted and tied the beast. Possibly the tracks were merely those of one of the searchers; but, knowing the disinclination of the natives to walk a single step that could be ridden, the Ranger did not think so.

He searched until he found another track beyond a jutting ledge. From this point he was quite out of sight of the main cañon. Beyond him was a mass of rock that hung out over the gulch from a point well above the height of a man's head. He could see the tracks of a man in the soil beneath this and also the unmistakable signs that a bear had been frequenting this spot.

"I had better," thought the Ranger, "go back to the village and get a witness that can't be suspected. It's pretty easy to guess what happened, but Mormons are long on prejudice and would take anything I said with reservations. They think I killed him and if I come in with his body they will be confirmed in the suspicion.

"It seems a shame to leave him there, but if he's in there now he's as dead as he will ever be, and a day or two more of weathering won't hurt him any."

He turned back and rode out of the maze of cañons toward Baker's Butte, where some prospectors were located. These he enlisted for the morrow's search and then took his way back to his camp. A belated wayfarer was passed on the road. To him the Ranger entrusted a message to Bill McGhie and others of the settlement.

Before noon next day half a dozen men came in with Bill, and, after a short rest for eating, they took the trail to the head of East Clear Creek. Upon their arrival they found two of the prospectors already there. They had brought a couple of pack horses in anticipation of a gruesome load.

The Ranger led the way, downward, pointing out that in all probability Forbes had descended at this spot. After some ticklish sliding they arrived at the talus spur marking the angle of the entering gorge.

"Here," said the Ranger, "if my theory is correct, Forbes walked across this gravel and rock, upon which no trace remains, leaping to the clay and sand bottom from somewhere near here. The stream was dry except in spots, but the bed had retained enough moisture to be soft.

"I think he jumped down here because the first print shows deep heel prints. It has remained perfectly plain owing to the rapid drying out of the soil. He carried, as Breck told us, a single-barreled repeating shotgun, holding six shells."

"It was my gun," said one of the settlers. "Dick done borrowed my old twelve-gage Winchester. It wasn't much of a gun."

"Not for what he had to meet," replied the Ranger. "If it was the beast whose tracks I saw he'd have been better off with a cannon. Now let's follow the tracks. Only there is one point I don't understand. Undoubtedly men rode these cañons during the search. Why didn't they look up here?"

"Well, Ranger," said the man who had owned the gun, "to tell the truth, we-all allowed that he was pretty securely planted —by you—and some of us was a mite careless in searchin'. I was one of the gang that raked these draws and we allowed we wouldn't find him unless we dug for him."

"It's not so certain it *is* him," said another. "What makes you so sure, Ranger? You ain't *seen* him, have you?"

"It isn't often that a man on foot comes down here," replied the Ranger. "It may not be him, but I can guess it is, can't I?"

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"You can," said the man, "but I ain't so sure it's all guessin' on your part."

"All right," said the Ranger. "It will do no good to argue the point when it can be easily settled. Here go the tracks. He was walking and in no hurry. He stopped here, I should say, to kick the mud from his shoe against this rock. You can see the mark of his muddy toe."

"A kid could read that," said Bill. "Let's get on."

"All right," said the Ranger, and walked on until he came to the great overhang of rock that projected from the cliff side. "He walked under this, as you can see from the sign. Notice the cavity under there? Yes! Well, it's plain that he didn't, until he had gone past, or at least didn't notice that it was full of bear meat that was still alive."

THE men gathered in front of the hole, looking at the huge paw tracks that told how the bear, roused by the passage of a man, had swung out of his hole where he had not yet gone to sleep for the Winter.

"See!" said the Ranger. "Old Brother Bear jumped down behind Forbes, between him and the entrance to this gorge. His tracks are above the shoe prints. And look here! Forbes wasn't ten feet away when he heard the beast growl! See where he turned and faced him! Look! He walked backward, away from the bear!"

The men followed his indicating finger closely, silently, crouching over the indelible record.

"The fool! The panic-stricken idiot! See here——"

He picked up a shotgun shell from beside the trail.

"He fired at a bear as big as a house, only five paces away, with a shell loaded with number eight shot, which must have had a light charge of powder behind it. You can gamble on that, for we know he was after pigeons."

"Sounds reasonable," murmured a man.

"It's certain. And what would a bear like that do if you fired a load of pepper in its face? What this one did: he sure went for Dick. Look at the tracks! He was hitting the high spots only. Did he think he could outrun a bear on level ground?"

"Here's another shell!" cried Bill, picking up a paper cylinder.

"See where his feet point sideways as he half turned to fire again! Lord! How the man must have run! Look at his stride! There's a third shell. He was pumping them as fast as he could work the slide."

"Here's the fourth." A prospector had found it.

"And this one makes five."

The Ranger ran forward to a dark, tattered bundle that lay on the ground fully two hundred yards from where the chase had commenced.

"We'll never find the last one," he muttered grimly. "It has destroyed itself in doing its work. Look at the gun!"

He picked up a rusty, bent and smashed ribbon of iron and some jagged splinters of walnut wood. The twisted barrel of what had been a repeating shotgun was split for six inches and the breech was shattered to bits.

"And this is Dick, I reckon." He stooped over the bundle of shreds of cloth and gleaming bones. The *lobos* had long ago polished the pitiful skeleton clean. But the Ranger was searching gingerly among the ghastly relics for an indication of the manner of death, which he soon found. Breast bone and ribs were shattered; the right forearm was splintered, the hand lying far away.

"He was firing very fast and his gun got too hot and foul to stand the strain. His last load exploded in the breech and blew gun, arm and side to pieces. Probably he was dead before the bear reached him, but at any rate he was dead soon after. Where's his head?"

"Here."

A man moved a grinning skull with his foot.

"The wolves have chawed it some."

They stood around the terrible record of death, silent and overawed. Presently the man who had owned the gun that had failed, spoke.

"Well, Ranger, if this is him, I reckon it lets you out."

He held out a hand and the rest also greeted the Ranger's innocence cordially and appropriately.

"If it is him!" repeated the Ranger. "There can be no doubt of that, I think."

"It will be hard to prove who it is," one man said. "The bones have been cleaned and the clothes are no more than rags. There ain't a thing that will identify him. Even the gun is busted to bits."

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The Ranger went over to the skull, picking it up with a shiver. As he lifted it the jaw bone dropped off, and in the teeth shone the gleam of gold and the gray of amalgam.

"This is evidence," said he. "Find the dentist who filled the teeth. He will know his own work and have charts of the fillings."

They silently gathered up the gruesome witnesses of that terrible and unavailing flight from death, packing them, wrapped in canvas, on the spare horses. Then with hardly a remark they took up their march, riding decorously at a walk, on the eighteen or twenty mile journey to the settlement. The horses plodded along with hanging heads, their listlessness comporting well with the funereal nature of the errand.

The party climbed to the plateau, filed across the intervening mile of level *mal pais* to the Rim and began the sliding, winding descent of the treacherous trail. The mournful grunts and complaints of the horses and the creaking of saddle leather alone broke the silence. Every man was reconstructing in his mind's eye the picture of the wild flight up the gorge ahead of the enraged beast and the final tragedy of flame and flying iron that had brought it to an end.

Of not a single chance for life had the man availed himself. In his panic he had neglected every maxim of woodcraft such as is learned in infancy by every dweller in the wilderness. For his flight one could hardly blame him, though all knew that the bold facing of the bear would probably have started that naturally peaceable animal away from him. For his panicky firing of fine shot in the animal's face there was less excuse, for a bear, if peaceable, is also easily roused to rage.

After that, flight alone could save him, since he had no knife, but flight on level ground from an animal that, despite its awkward gait, can nearly catch a horse, was suicidal. Forbes had not paused to remember that up-hill flight is the only hope for a man in such a position, and had neglected the quick dash up some slanting ledge that might have saved him. Thus he had come to lie there and furnish food for hungry *lobos*. Thus he had perished, and the Ranger, for one, shuddering at the fantom of that swift terror that had been his, accepted it as overfull expiation.

NEITHER he nor Bill had any desire to face the curious folk of the village and they went on to Bill's ranch without entering the town. In the morning the Ranger was glad to leave and take the trail for the Verde, where he had a last task to perform in connection with the sale of some poles.

But he was disgusted to encounter old Moroni Lane on the road just before he turned off toward Strawberry. The old fellow was evidently going up on the Mountain, for he let the Ranger pass him and made no move to follow. There were blankets and bundles tied to the ancient saddle which supported him, astride an ancient and moth-eaten horse, and a carbine was slung in a scabbard beneath his thigh.

As the Ranger crowded past him Moroni made a quick grasp at his rifle, but either the young man's smile or the beautifully slight distance between the butt of his six shooter and the hand disarmed him. The Ranger noted that redness of eye and the shifting wildness of them. But he was even more taken up with the sonorous and able-bodied anathemas that rolled from the old man's lips even as they had done before.

Moroni droned away at his Scripture mill in a tenuous monotone until the Ranger had passed out of hearing, but the echoes rang in that young man's ears for many a mile.

" 'The mean man boweth not down, and the great man humbleth himself not; therefore, forgive him not.

" 'O ye wicked ones, enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for the fear of the Lord and the glory of His majesty shall smite thee.

" 'Yea, and the day of the Lord shall come upon all the cedars of Lebanon, for they are high and lifted up; and upon all the oaks of Bashan.

" 'And upon all the high mountains and upon all the hills. . . .

" 'The show of their countenance doth witness against them, and doth declare their sin to be even as Sodom and they can not hide it. Wo unto their souls. . . .

" 'Wo unto the wicked, for they shall perish; for the reward of their hands shall be upon them. . . .

" 'And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and His Holy One for a flame, and shall burn and shall devour his thorns and his briers in one day;

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" 'And shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body; and they shall be as when a standard bearer fainteth.

" 'And the rest of the trees of his forest shall be few, that a child may write them.' "

As the Ranger spurred past the muttering old fanatic with a shake of the head for his invective, the Mormon shook his hands in the air as if calling down the wrath of his deities upon him. Vaguely uneasy, but hardly annoyed at the crazy old man, he rode on out of sight, turning to get a last glimpse of Moroni climbing the steep road and still mouthing his curses.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FIRE!

THE Ranger was returning in a leisurely manner to his camp at Pivot Rock after spending a couple of days in the Verde Valley. It was early in December, and the snow should have flown at least a week ago. Yet the sky was clear where it showed between the treetops, and even the light fleece of clouds that usually banked in the north was absent. A great deal of the chill was out of the air, and the buckskin tunic could be worn open without discomfort.

The Ranger longed for that first fall of the snow, for though it was time for his furlough to begin, he could not leave the Mountain while any chance spark might start a blaze that would end in infinite destruction. Billions of feet of timber were under his care, and the monetary value of it alone was almost beyond calculation, to say nothing of its use as a preservative of the waters that were so precious in a thirsty land.

At his tent, under the queer, balanced stone, the stream trickled from the trough built for horses and meandered a short distance down the gorge before it sank into the dry soil and disappeared. It was alarmingly low and might cease altogether under a severe frost, though it was supposed never to have run dry.

In the evening it should have been very cold, but, when he was ready to turn in, the Ranger noticed that the air was barely nipping. He heard a sough of wind on the hills above him and was sufficiently interested in the weather to climb to the summit and see whence it blew. It was from the south; from the warm, dry desert.

He was a little perturbed over this, but it did not keep him from sleeping well enough. In the morning the wind blew harder, but it was still a south wind and warm. It certainly did not herald snow. No moisture could be blown from the desert to the south, and so long as the wind remained in this quarter the Ranger's work was not over.

Wearily enough he finished his breakfast, hung out his blankets and saddled his horse, to resume the endless round of his patrol. He rode along, thinking dreamily of Helen and how her eyes had smiled when she had driven away toward Flagstaff. Then he thought of Dave, and whether he was really on the Mountain, hidden in the fastness of Lost Eden, or whether the Territorial Rangers, who seemed to have disappeared from the hills, had found and captured him.

The Ranger did not care, since Helen was safe. As for himself, he knew that any one who took him at a disadvantage would have to be more expert and cunning than was Dave. He was abundantly able to take care of himself.

He wondered where the police had gone and what had become of them. They might be still and forever in Lost Eden, buried out of sight. Neither the Ranger nor any other knows to this day where they lie. They had gone that way and they did not return. But, without knowledge on this subject, the Ranger troubled himself little about them.

Neither this nor the fact that Moroni Lane was evidently on the Mountain at a time when the snow clouds banked every morning in the north, for the purpose of supplying Dave with necessities—for he could have no other errand—were any business of the Ranger's. He would think of pleasant things, so he wished that he had kissed Helen more often before she had gotten away.

He climbed the summit of a ridge that overlooked the rolling country and the *mal pais* lying east of the country road and south to the Rim. Here he drew up his horse and leaned forward to get a full view of the sea of hills and trees before him. For a moment he stared blankly into the chaos, and then a cold shiver of fear ran down his spine. There was that in front of him which is the constant dread of every forester in the Southwest.

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From East Clear Creek's edge, stretching in a swinging arc of half a mile's length or more, a pall of smoke gloomed the sky, while the dry crackle and roar of flames that eat the forest reached his ears from where the south wind fanned them. Flickering spikes of flame beat up and down in the black cover.

To the north lay millions of acres of timber, baked dry as tinder by the long drought. From the south blew the untimely gale, fanning the flames on, on, on, until, it might be, they would sweep clear to Flagstaff and Winslow, devouring all that lay in their way. Here was work for a Ranger, and here, at last, was that whimsically sought conflict with Titan forces that was to prove him a man.

It was no work for one man, though. At first it seemed to the Ranger that the fire was burning over the entire length of that half-mile strip, but he perceived on closer inspection, that there were half a dozen separate blazes, parted from each other by considerable spaces, beneath the smoke clouds. Once they should join and move forward in an unbroken line there would be work for many men in fighting the dragon.

But, as near as he could judge, the broken country cut the line of fires in several places, making it likely that the junction would not occur for some little time, and, if attacked in time, would perhaps even be prevented. The draws and gullies, too, would for some time prevent a rapid march northward of the flames, which was, above all things, the one to be hindered at any cost.

The Ranger measured the wind with a moistened finger. It was failing; not blowing more than a steady breeze by now. This was encouraging; but he well knew that, if the fire should grow to large enough proportions, a draft would set in behind it that would drive it fast enough. In the final analysis, the fate of the forest depended on the element of time. The Ranger regretted the long hours he had lain asleep, unconscious of the danger. He looked gloomily at the huge sweep of plateau and thought more gloomily of the scattered settlements and the disfavor which was his with the inhabitants of them.

He dismounted and quietly tightened his cinches, looking critically to his horse. How good a horse was he? Grain and grooming had made him handsome, but he was only a mustang after all, and he wondered if his confidence in the beast might, after all, be misplaced. This would be a ride that few horses could endure, and the sorrel had never yet been called upon to do anything that any horse might not accomplish. Would he do this that was expected of him?

THE Ranger looked again at the sweep of dun smoke and flame and threw himself to the saddle. The horse leaped willingly under the spur and cantered across a level park into which the ridge ran, which was free of *mal pais*. The old Verde Road and the Fort Apache Trail lay at the end of this flat, and over these the Ranger must ride, first to the Gentile settlements of the Verde, to rouse the cattlemen, then swinging in a wide circle across the sweep of desert to Fossil Creek, Strawberry and Pine, to warn and summon all the men that were available.

The horse was swinging lithely and smoothly over the easy ground and the Ranger almost instinctively fell into his old habit, crossing his hands lightly on the saddle-horn and swaying mechanically to the motion, while his eyes were on the ground in front and his thoughts far away. Now he was thinking of the discouraging fact that the rules of the Department authorized a Ranger to spend no more than three hundred dollars on any one fire, unless he got express authority from Washington direct, to exceed this limit. The Ranger pondered this problem. Would three hundred dollars be enough? He made swift calculations as he rode.

Two dollars a day for each man employed was all that the Government paid. Saddle horses were allowed a dollar a day, teams three dollars and a half. Thirty men at two dollars—sixty dollars; thirty horses at one dollar—ninety dollars; ten teams at three fifty—one hundred and ten dollars a day.

He shook a perplexed head. The sum was not enough, that was certain. He smiled at the parsimony of the Government and figured the ultimate cost to himself.

He would send a man to Jerome with a telegram to the Bureau, asking for more money. In the meantime he would hire such men as he could get and fight it out with Washington after the battle was over. Probably he would have to pay it himself.

The cattlemen must join, at the low

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wages paid, for their grazing privileges were subject to the obligation to fight fires when called upon. The Mormon settlers, too, held their claims on the same conditions. While the small pay was no inducement to these men, the Ranger knew that they would cheerfully answer his call, Gentile and Mormon alike, and no compulsion would be necessary even for opponents of Forest Reserves.

There was a further danger which he did not like to think of. It was very remote, however. If Helen was on the Mountain she might be cut off by the flames, but it was almost certain that she had reached Flagstaff by this, or would at least be there long before the fire could reach her. He dismissed this chimera and rode on to do, with his horse, a work that both might boast of in the future.

He swung on with a lope that was as fast as he dared drive his beast, and which told severely on him, as it also did on the mousehound, which ran behind him. The Ranger noted this, and, when he had arrived opposite his camp, waved and shouted the beast toward it. The dog whined and protested, but finally slunk away, and the Ranger loped on, wondering how the poor beast was to get food during the next twenty-four hours. But a dog was not to be considered before the task that was his.

The horse moved with a smooth swing that insensibly gathered speed until he was rushing across the flat land at a killing pace. This was hardly mitigated when the dim, half-obliterated Apache Trail showed between the trees. On this, for mile after mile, they swept steadily onward.

The Ranger swayed to the rocking motion and thought of all sorts of incongruous things. Especially did the remembrance of old Moroni Lane, snarling his falsetto curses, his eyes gleaming redly and his gray face working with venomous fury, oppress him. Verses of the Mormon Scripture which had been on the old fanatic's lips were now in the Ranger's mind:

> Yea, and the day of the Lord shall come upon all the cedars of Lebanon, for they are high and lifted up; and upon all the oaks of Bashan.
>
> And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and His Holy One for a flame, and shall burn and shall devour his thorns and his briers in one day;
>
> And shall consume the glory of his forest. . . .

"That blooming prophecy is startlingly appropriate to this thing," muttered the Ranger. "Too remarkably appropriate, to be frank. I suspect a little more than a coincidence therein."

He crossed the Verde road and turned into it, finding it rougher than the old trail. The pines were growing smaller and more scattered, and the low, gnarled cedars took their place on the bare, brown slopes. He swept on past Mud Tanks, lying almost dry and foul with little pools of stagnant water and slime. The road, heretofore following almost level ground, began to pitch steeply. The ruts and rocks of the abominable road presented dangers to the steadily galloping horse, but the black *mal pais* threatened more, so he was forced to cling to the beaten path.

The horse grunted as he lurched down the rough slopes, and there was a slight jar in his limbs which told that some of the spring was lost to them. But the Ranger pushed him on with voice and spur, though the sturdy beast needed little urging.

Trotting, scrambling, galloping, he hurried along the rock-hewn path along Clear Creek Cañon until at last he scrambled down to the dreary, flat expanse of alkali and sand in the Verde Valley. Among the rocky hills he had been sure-footed as a goat, but now he stumbled as he picked up his gallop again.

They came to the banks of the green-fringed river, and the Ranger let his horse stand in the water and drink a little. After a few minutes, he waded the stream and noted with joy that the brute tossed his head and pulled the bit as he stretched into his gallop again. He had covered thirty miles of frightful country, but he seemed quite fresh as yet.

They pushed on to the first ranch and roused the inhabitants. The men were all at the village and, beside women, there was only a boy available. Not a horse remained except one old pensioner that was driven by the women. The Ranger urged the boy to get word to every man he could find and spread a general alarm through the village, and then turned back upon the road to Pine.

The horse tore through the shallow river and out across the flat toward the wide bench that lay between Clear and Fossil Creeks. It was touch and go on the narrow road along the Clear Creek Cliffs, and the horse was hard to control to a slower pace, but the Ranger held him to the path

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and won safely to the bench at last. Here lay more danger in the shape of *mal pais*, but he drove on across the terrible footing, heedless and warm with the effort at holding the iron brute that he bestrode. Thoroughly roused to his work, the great, red beast ran hard and recklessly, lending the rider his assets of speed and ferocity.

IT WAS dark when they lurched over the edge of Fossil Creek, and the white Trail made but a dim streak in the gloom. Yet they plunged down it, with little heed to limbs or neck. How they arrived at the bottom without disaster is a mystery. The Ranger's bones were aching after over fifty miles of that ride, and his mental impressions were a mixture of dull, sullen resentment at the tireless beast that he rode and a determination to cling to him somehow with raw legs and stiff muscles until he should reach Pine village.

Going up the breakneck climb on the opposite side of the cañon, he felt the relief of relaxed sinews, and fairly lolled in the saddle. At the top he rolled from the saddle and let the horse rest. It was high time, for the saddle rolled with him, and the first sign of fatigue in the horse was evident in the fact that he did not kick and drag the man to death. But there was not an ounce of vice left in him.

After fifteen minutes of rest, during which the Ranger's back and legs grew creaky with stiffness, he adjusted the saddle and climbed wearily to his seat. The horse was willing and even insistent now upon trotting, and the rider suffered fresh agony from that, for all the spring was gone from those powerful legs. It seemed to take many hours before they pulled up at last in front of Bill McGhie's cabin, where the Ranger yelled loudly for the owner. The door opened a few inches and Bill demanded what was wanted.

"The whole condemned Mountain is on fire," gasped the Ranger. "Get my horses from the pasture and get a wagon loaded with supplies. I'm due in Pine right now."

"You're due in bed," said Bill gloomily, as he noted the whiteness of the Ranger's face. "You come in. I'll ride to Pine. You're plumb tuckered out."

"Not yet," grinned the Ranger wanly. "I am good for a week yet. You come on when you get ready. I've turned 'em out over on the Verde and they'll be there tomorrow."

Then he lurched on his way, shouting hoarsely at the ranch doors and summoning men to the combat. He hardly realized the time until it was finally called to his attention by the fact that, in the last ranches, he must pound on the doors to arouse sleeping folk, whereby he got much cursing and little goodwill.

It was midnight when he staggered down the single street of Pine, making night hideous with his hoarse alarm. But it was not needed. A glance to the left showed the frowning Rim looming grimly black against a red pall of smoke. The settlers, unless they were blind, must have known long ago that a fire raged up there. A man who answered his yells assured the Ranger that half a dozen men had gone up that evening. The Ranger swore comprehensively.

"Half a dozen! It will take half a hundred to make a dent in that fire. Get busy, you shorthorns, and load up your picks and shovels."

He sat on his horse in front of the store and answered questions of the men who came running from various houses. These carried the alarm through the village. The Ranger felt rather indifferent to further effort himself, but the horse, though his head was drooping, had ambition enough left, in spite of that sixty-five-mile race, to kick swiftly at a dog that smelled his heels. The Ranger wished to rest but he had not spirit enough to dismount.

A Mormon maiden roused him. The Ranger had been drowsily aware of her approach and of an exclamation of alarm when she saw him in the light cast by a lantern on the porch. A few minutes or an hour later she came again, bearing a steaming drink. It was a whisky toddy. She apologized for the fact that coffee was an abomination in the sight of the Mormons, and so she could bring only strong liquors, which they were not so particular about.

The Ranger had his nose in the hot liquid when her apology reached his ears. He withdrew it long enough to assure her that it made no vital difference. Whisky was quite satisfactory to him. His horse needed liquor also. He climbed down and let the great beast find his way to the irrigating ditch, while he sat down, very softly, on the platform.

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"Ouch!" remarked the Range Rider gently.

"Do you want another drink?" asked the Mormon Hebe.

"What I want," said the Ranger, "is a padded lounge. I am wrecked beyond repair."

An hour later Bill McGhie drove up in a wagon loaded with bedding, provisions, picks and shovels. Behind it were the spare horses which had been latterly left in pasture by the Ranger. The latter calmly kicked the blankets and quilts from the roll, threw his saddle in the wagon bed and followed it, to lie down upon the bedding. He left his horse to be led up to the camp as soon as the animal had had a couple of days' rest. No one but he would trust his life in the saddle on that beast.

When he awoke it was to find himself at Pivot Rock Spring, where a swarm of men, horses, wagons and dogs made a great deal of noise in the little basin. There were ten riders from the Verde there and as many more from Pine, and others were coming in rapidly. It behooved him to arise and take command of his army. So, with some rebellion of the spirit, he saddled his fresh horse and led his battalions out to the fray.

The cowpunchers stuck picks and shovels on their saddles and rattled after him. Half the men remained to load the pack horses and keep communications open. Smoke drifted lazily over them. The wind seemed to have died down. But the Ranger's relief was greatest to know that the fire had not yet reached the road.

"What set this thing off?" asked Bill McGhie, as they trotted toward the cañons.

"I don't know," answered the Ranger. "It was no accident, at any rate."

"Might have been a camp-fire left," said Bill.

The Ranger laughed derisively.

"There isn't a camper on the Mountain. And this fire started in half a dozen different places. Some one set it, I tell you."

"Who?" asked Bill.

"I'll give you one guess," replied the Ranger. "And you will guess wrong. It was the Lord of Zion by means of an instrument to His hand."

"I thought it might be old Moroni," said Bill apologetically.

"I rather think that he was the said Lord's agent in the matter," agreed the Ranger.

CHAPTER XXIX

A FIGHT AND A VISION

THE company soon heard the crackling of the flames, while the smoke grew denser and began to cause feelings of discomfort among them. As they neared the area of the fire, though they could see little of it, sparks and blazing pine needles began to drop among them, frightening the horses. The actual blaze was hidden by the smoke. The Ranger set a few men to dragging brush across some patches of dry grass which caught from the sparks, while he and Bill rode to a high point near by and looked over the field.

From the main cañon of East Clear Creek, the flames had crept out and across the draws until they had joined and now presented a wall of smoke and fire a mile long, running nearly north and south but bending somewhat to the west. The wind had aided in this change from its original appearance and the rough draws had shaped the course of the conflagration.

But the Ranger felt by no means hopeless as he surveyed the ground. Eastward, Clear Creek Cañon barred the spread of the fire. This was East Clear Creek, whose course was almost north, while West Clear Creek lay far toward the Verde Valley and flowed nearly west.

Southward was the Rim and west of the fire lay Long Valley and the County Road, which would furnish clear areas and lanes of strategic value. If the wind blew continuously from the south the fight would center in the comparatively narrow gap of timber which lay between Long Valley and the Cañon, in the effort to prevent it from sweeping out into the wide forest north of that point.

If, on the other hand, it shifted to the east, the County Road would make a fire line from which to operate, but if it ever crossed that narrow strip there would be little hope of stopping it. If it swung around to the north, the fire would be blown back to the Rim and would die there without further effort. And that last fortune was the one they had every right to hope for in view of the season and the long-delayed snow.

The Ranger led his men down a draw, sending one back for reënforcements and tools. The gully they were in crossed the

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fire half a mile ahead of it. The flames were traveling slowly. If they could trench and backfire, it might be stopped at this point.

But the draw was shallow and timber grew almost to its edge. Nevertheless they turned to their work with a will. In a little while more men came to aid them. Acrid smoke drifted over them like a pall, but they dug feverishly. They dragged in a plow and drove long furrows down the gully. The plow suffered severely from the rocky experience, but nobody heeded that.

At last the Ranger set the backfire and watched it creep lazily toward the fire. They were shrouded in smoke; men were moving like ghosts along the trench, hardly visible a hundred feet away. But sparks no longer fell, and a man posted back of the line to kill ground-fires that were started by those that overpassed the defense, rode in to report that he was not needed.

The Ranger hardly knew what to think. They could feel no wind in the stifling smoke. The men on the east of the fire line reported that, although the ground fire had reached them, they were beating it back with ease, and, as yet, could see nothing of the crown fire—by far the more dangerous.

It was getting along toward evening. Most of the men were tired. The Ranger took five of them and rode out to the west and south, skirting the smoke as closely as he could. But he could not see that the fire had progressed far toward the north. It seemed, rather, to be stationary. Yet the smoke was hanging farther west.

"Humph!" he said to Bill. "We're having a change of wind, I'll gamble."

"I reckon *so*," replied Bill gloomily. "We done went and wasted a lot of work."

"Not much," said the Ranger. "That fire line will do its part of the work yet. But two men can ride it now. One of you go back and bring the rest up this way."

They rode on toward the south of the blaze, and, as they went, encountered flying sparks. It seemed to the Ranger that the roar was growing louder. He coursed the ground carefully, marking all downward slopes on this side the blaze. Then he sent back for another plow.

When it came, they set to work running furrows along the rough, broken line of slopes that promised reward to their efforts. But the line was long and the work slow. The tired, sweating men, Mormon and Gentile alike, worked their best.

As each furrow was run they set the backfire, but it burned with appalling slowness in the calm that hovered so near the fire. The men behind the lines now had their hands full, dragging boughs across the ground-fires that started wherever a spark fell.

The Ranger felt a puff of scorching wind from the east and gave the word to fall back. That breeze meant danger to all who stayed longer. If the new line was to hold, it must do so without their aid. Incomplete as it was, they could risk no more on it.

From a rise half a mile away they watched the smoke and flames rolling along the ground ahead of the slower inferno in the treetops. A long, billowy line swept down the slopes, slowing noticeably when across the crest, and rolled majestically over the feeble backfire.

Sheets of flame leaped out and sank again, and then the men groaned to see, a minute later, a snaky line of flame on their side of the trench. A moment later a dead pine burst into flame. Then the huge, reddened smoke cloud rolled over their work and marched onward.

Half of the men worked on, trenching and backfiring through the night, while the other half retreated to the safety of the camp and slept. They relieved each other at intervals, Bill McGhie commanding one shift and the Ranger the other. At every opportunity they ran their lines, fighting desperately to gain an advantage over any part of the long line of flames.

Men thrown to the north flanked the blaze and kept it from eating in that direction, the object being to keep the line from lengthening. A road did yeoman service for them there, and a clearing or two made the effort successful.

The cowmen grew reckless as the work got more familiar. The Ranger, too, sleepless, black and scorched, acquired a certain contempt for the flame. At times they would throw their lariats over a felled cedar and spur drunkenly along the front of battle, shouting in the stifling smoke and sweeping the grass fires with their huge brooms. But the fire ate its way steadily westward, creeping around or overleaping their frail barriers.

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ON THE second day there were forty men and ten teams at work. On the third it was evident that they could not succeed without further help. The Ranger scribbled a telegram to Washington, asking for a further sum of money, and sent it down by a man who was instructed to hire every man that he could find.

On the following day, the fourth of the fight, twenty more reported, and with these the Ranger made his fight. If sixty could not stop the fire, six hundred would be as useless. It would take at least four days to get a reply to the telegram, for it must be mailed to the nearest station, two days away, but the Ranger did not propose to wait that long. In four days that fire might do a good deal of damage if left to itself.

On the third day the water in Long Valley and at Drayton's Spring was exhausted and they had to haul all that was required from Pivot Rock and the foul tanks. They were pot-black, red-eyed and reeling, but they drove the shattered plows on every slope and lit the backfires hopefully.

On the south they even held the blaze back for a day, and the resulting gain of the north end swung the whole line to the northwest, which was the result the Ranger's strategy aimed at. Encouraged, the riders whooped hoarsely as they rode like fantoms through the terrible smoke, dragging their cedars behind them. They dug with plow, pick and shovel, until their backs ached and their hands were raw with blisters.

Back and ever backward they drifted, fighting every foot in what was, by this time, a wild, insensate determination to hang on to the last gasp. By all rules of common sense, they should long ago have given up and contented themselves with skirmishing, but neither the Ranger nor his maddened scouts were inclined to respect rules. They felt a personal and bitter enmity against the fire and resented a hint that it could whip them at last.

They never called on the powers above for aid. It had become a matter of pride to down that fire with no further help from Nature than that they were entitled to—the long-overdue north wind. That was the only Blücher these Wellingtons prayed for.

They would take that much from God, but, for the rest, like the old trapper and his bear fight, all they asked of Him was to stand aside and see one soul-inspiring and delirious combat. The idea of earning the paltry wages never figured to the men. There was not one of them that would not have *paid* rather than lose his part in the fray.

The Ranger told Bill, on the evening of the third day, to fall back and let the relief fight it out on the south of the line.

"Huh!" said Bill. "I done got the linin' knocked out of this puny bonfire. Go on back to your sleep. I'm a-goin' to *prove* we can lick it."

Thus he refused, as did his men, to leave, and with both squads working, they actually held that inferno from crossing the line for nearly twelve hours. Then, when trees were springing into flames almost over their heads, and men and horses were choking for air, they rode for life and another chance to continue the fight. But they had swung the line, and that was a point gained.

The new men that came gave them fresh energy. These later arrivals, within twenty-four hours, were as bitterly personal in their feeling toward the blaze as those who had fought it from the first. Likewise, they were as black, though not so badly burned. The Ranger had long given up any attempt to calculate how much he had overrun his allowance. He was determined to continue the fight if he had to spend his own fortune upon it.

So they fell back, or rode back, sometimes for very life, but contesting every down slope and every gully, hanging on to open parks and clearings until the flames had nearly cut them off a dozen times. Back, back, across their first camp they retreated, holding that ground a day and a night, so crazy that they threw stones at the wall of smoke and called it insulting names.

On the sixth night of tremendous effort, the Ranger almost sobbed as he gave the order to retreat to Long Valley and make a last stand east of the County Road. He felt grieved at the unfairness of Providence in still withholding the wind and snow that were their due at least a week ago. He could not tell whether there were any clouds in the sky, for it had been nearly a week since any of them had been able to see it through the murk.

That night, the seventh of the fire, the weary squad, overwhelmed by a feeling of

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despair and a conviction of failure, lay in a stupor of fatigue and relaxation, among the litter of wagons, hay, bedding and camp utensils that were scattered in Pivot Rock Draw. For the first time the Ranger stopped to consider his hurts, aches and pains. There were many of them, but their sharpness had long ago worn away, leaving only a dull, throbbing numbness that seemed entirely separate and removed from any mere nervous sensation.

It was as if body and feeling had parted company, while still retaining some thread of communication. What was left of his senses were disembodied and impartial. His body was an unattached personality whose sufferings he perceived as if they were those of a person twenty feet away. He had no desire for, nor conscious need of, sleep such as obsessed his assistants. He was hypnotized, intoxicated by and superior to physical suffering. He was drugged and drunk with fatigue and pain.

But he could hear and think to a limited extent at least, though for the moment his powers of correlation were gone. He vaguely knew that his fight was lost unless the wind should shift and the snow begin to fly by the next day. But he had not the least conception of the importance of the fight, its interest, nor what it was all about. His disembodied intellect was serenely removed from emotions of any kind. A vaudeville hypnotist might have gained control of him by moving a finger.

THERE was a golden mist that gradually filled the air in front of him. In it a vast, confused swirl of figures came and went. Now and then one would stand forth more clearly than the others. Thus he saw Moroni Lane, lowering and mowing and waving firebrands around his head while he danced a grotesque and triumphant fandango. There was also a mighty, red-mouthed and white-fanged ursine beast that bestrode a heap of gleaming bones and a bleached skull, in the jaws of which glittered a scintillating gold tooth. He saw a towering tableland of black boulders shrouded in and overhung by a mighty cloud of blacker smoke, through which shot and flashed flickering swords of flame.

There were a crackling and crash of burning wood and falling trees; a wild, immeasurably distant vision of terrific holocausts and tortured figures of human beings. 'Round and 'round it in an immense circle a figure, that might have been himself as he once had been, rode endless, crawling miles on a jogging horse, or galloped wildly, swaying in the saddle and shouting hoarse alarms.

Then the flames appeared to fade away and the mist swirled into another form. He seemed to be looking down upon an enormous stretch of country from a great height or else viewing it through the wrong end of a telescope, for the details were brilliantly clear while infinitely small. It was a vast, broken plateau in high relief.

He could see a railroad, which seemed to be that at Flagstaff, and the smoke of a crawling train hung over the tiny ribbon of track. He could see the winding line of the road that ran southward to the place where he knew himself to be. It flowed over hill and gully, through clearing and forest down to his own camp at Pivot Rock and past it, until it pitched from the Rim and swept on toward Pine village.

But the face of this world was strangely changed. It was white, and he viewed it through cloudy mists and flurries of snow that drove across the plateau. Great drifts shifted and piled in every cavity; sleet drove before a howling gale. Far down on the edge of the Rim steamed a dying fire, a thin ribbon of desultory flames ringing a blank, ruined, desert spot of ink on the visionary map.

Far north, near Willow Valley, which was easily recognizable in the picture, he saw a figure heaving its heavy way through drifts and hummocks of snow, staggering and plunging along with infinite, patient effort. It was a horse which carried a rider. On its back was humped a man who glared ever forward and, though the rider's back must have been to the dreamer, he seemed to see the face as well as if he faced him.

Reddened and frost-bitten it was, unshaven and distorted, but he had no difficulty in identifying it as that of Dave Lane, the outlaw. Its hands were cracked and blue with cold, but they clung like claws to a short rifle. The figure searched the snow in front, watching for something as yet distant.

The Ranger's vision shifted ahead of the sinister figure and perceived a toy buckboard, drawn by a pair of stout, straining horses, that crawled down the road toward Willow Valley. Baggage lay back of the

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seat, in which sat a frightened man who lashed the horses and a muffled woman who clung to the man. Her face barely showed beneath the hood that swathed her head, but the Ranger knew that she was dark-haired, brown-eyed and very beautiful.

Ahead of them the drifts banked high, and a few miles down the road crept that ogreish man who awaited them and his vengeance. Back of them was higher ground, where the drifts thinned out toward Flagstaff, blown southward by the wind. The man that drove the horses was in the likeness of Helen's father and the girl was his daughter.

The vision faded slowly and the Ranger became aware that some one had viciously kicked him in the side and was shouting:

"WAKE up, you! It's snowin' to beat a flush!"

He rolled over with a groan, and suddenly found that his smarts and aches had taken possession of his body again. With the instinct of habit he felt for his watch to see what the time was. Snow fell from his blackened tunic and his hands, numb with cold, could hardly clutch and drag from his pocket a mass of springs and metal that had been a watch until that kick had demolished it. He let it slide into the camp-fire, which had kept him from freezing.

Overhead, on the enclosing heights, a northerly gale whooped and screamed among the pines. Around him joyous men bustled, slinging beds, provisions and utensils into the wagons and talking jubilantly of the timely snowstorm. Driven southward before the wind, the flames might still sweep a few acres of timber, but must soon burn out on the impassable Rim.

The Ranger climbed to his feet with pain and profanity, carefully and slowly stretching his aching limbs. He turned his back to the fire and raised his eyes to the hills. Just in front of him, nailed to a sapling pine about a dozen feet away, was an object, at which he stared while a growing wonder crept into his bloodshot eyes.

"Well, I'll be everlastingly hornswoggled," he murmured vulgarly. Then he raised his voice.

"Olcott!" he called. "Come over here!"

His chief assistant, a Verde cattleman, dropped a pack saddle on the ground and sauntered over.

"You've come out of it, have you? Sho! but you was a-sittin' there dead to the world an' as stiff as a post. You see we've got our wind."

"Yes," said the Ranger. "But, Olcott, when you kicked me awake so gently, which way was I facing?"

"Same as you are now," said Olcott. "What's that got to do with fightin' fires?"

"Nothing," said the Ranger. "Was my head up? Was I sitting or lying?"

"You're a heap interested in the way you was restin'," grumbled Olcott. "You was sittin' all hunched up, partly facin' the fire. Yer head was lollin' back an' yer eyes was open an' starin' till I thought you was throwin' a fit. I was so scart, I just give you a kick in the slats so as to bring you out of it."

"And you certainly kicked all the wheels out of my Ingersoll," said the Ranger, as he mournfully shoved the fragments farther into the fire with his toe. "Say, Olcott!"

"What?"

"Did you ever hear of a person hypnotizing himself?"

"I've heard of folks goin' loco, if that's what you mean."

"Some day, Olcott," said the Ranger, "get a little round mirror, tie it up somewhere, fasten a string to it so you can whirl it around and look at it very steadily. If you do it long enough, something will very likely happen."

"I shouldn't wonder," replied Olcott. "Some law-abidin' citizen would sure aim to take me into custody for bein' drunk an' disorderly thataway, if I went to kickin' up any contortions like them you describe. Which I wouldn't blame him none, neither."

He returned to his work, while the Ranger looked at the object on the tree trunk and wondered at what had happened. Some dandy of the camp had brought with him and fastened there a small shaving-mirror which caught and tossed back fantastically, in little, jumping flashes, the beams of light from the fire.

There could be little doubt that the visions had been the result of self-hypnosis induced, in his exhausted state, by unconscious gazing at this flickering trinket. As to the significance of the apparition, the Ranger preferred to dismiss reflection. He still had duties to perform.

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CHAPTER XXX

THE PLOT

THAT affairs had taken Hilda Petersen up on the Mountain while the great forest fire was raging would have been a subject for reflection on the part of any one who had known about it, if there had been any. But it seems that no one knew that she had been there, going up by way of Myrtle, which was far to the east of the fire-swept area. Yet she had been there and had returned.

Though she had gone alone, when she came back there were two men with her. All three came down at night, avoiding carefully any chance of being seen and went by devious ways toward Moroni Lane's ranch at Pine village. These men had the look, if one had been able to see them in the dark, of hunted wolves, but one, who was Dave Lane, was grim and silent, while the other, who was his father, muttered constant, lurid curses of a biblical character, and snarled and mowed against his own enemies and those of the Lord of Zion.

If any reason was to be sought for this exodus from the fastnesses of Lost Eden, it would have been easily found in the fact that the swamp, though safe enough from the officers of the law, was not a comfortable residence in Winter. It was necessary for those who frequented it in the warmer seasons to hunt another refuge when the snow began to fly.

For the time being, that refuge was Lane's ranch, where they could lie safely hidden, with Hilda to attend them and provide needed sustenance. Thus Dave and Moroni Lane, both at war with the constituted authorities, came down when Hilda brought them the news that nearly all the able-bodied men of Pine were out of the way, engaged in fighting the fire they had set.

This was on the second day of the fire. On the following morning Hilda started toward the village to get certain supplies which were needed. They had slept late, having been up nearly all night, and it was far toward noon when she drove from the ranch in a light wagon.

Consequently she encountered the man whom the Ranger had sent down that morning, as he was resting his horse at the store. Hilda wished to know as much as possible of the progress of the fight and joined the group of women and one or two boys and old men who were listening to the man.

"I've got to git more men," he was saying. "There ought to be some around hereaways."

"There ain't none left in Pine that can go," rejoined one of the listeners. "Why don't you ride over to Payson and hire a bunch there? There may be some at the Verde, but it will take you a day longer to git there."

"I got a telegram to send for the Ranger, over to the Verde," explained the man. "I got to go there anyway."

Hilda thought that there might be something in that telegram that would interest her and her friend. There was a perfectly simple and easy way to get it and find out. The man would, but for this errand, ride to Payson, which was south, without hesitation, as he could get men there much sooner and more certainly than at the Verde Valley.

"I'm ridin' to the Verde," she said. "Let me have the telegram and I'll send it for you."

"But it's got to go as soon as possible," said the man.

"I'm on my way right now," she replied. "I'll get there tonight some time and that will be in time to catch the stage tomorrow. It couldn't go any sooner than that."

The difference between an eighteen-mile ride across easy country to Payson and one of thirty or more over the bad lands to the Verde was quite enough to decide the man. He surrendered the telegram without hesitation, having no reason to do otherwise, and betook himself off on his other errand. As for Hilda, she drove away toward the Verde until beyond the village, turned south to a road that ran on the other side of a range of hills, and circled back to the ranch from which she had come.

Here she showed the telegram to the fugitives. They all amused themselves by assuming that they had blocked the Ranger's effort to get more funds with which to continue his hopeless fight. But, after a while, Hilda's wits began to work on a new prospect of revenge.

"That Beran girl has gone to Flag," she remarked, "and we can't none of us lay our hands on her. Now, I'd like to see her sweat and I reckon you would too, Dave."

"If she ever comes within reach of me, she'll do worse than that," snarled Dave.

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Moroni Lane droned out a textual curse.

"I was thinkin'," said Hilda, "that we might sort of coax her to come back, thataway."

"Do it," said Dave, "and I'll settle her hash."

"We got this telegram, which we ain't agoin' to send in any hurry," said Hilda. "But that ain't any reason we shouldn't send any telegram. We might send one to her from this Ranger, and I reckon she would be glad to hear from him, because she just naturally dotes a heap on him."

She thought a few moments and then shook her head.

"We better not send it from him, though. If he was laid up so that he had to have his sweetheart to hold his fevered hand, thataway, he wouldn't likely be able to write no telegrams. We'd better send it from Bill McGhie, I reckon."

Dave began to understand.

"If he was badly burned in that fire, now," he added, "I reckon she'd just come a-runnin' to nurse him a plenty. And he ought to be burnt, even if he ain't been yet. I reckon he will be, too. She'll come down on the County Road as fast as she can and I wouldn't be at all surprised if me and the old man might not be a-layin' for her somewheres along the route."

"The Lord delivereth them into our hands," piously affirmed Moroni.

"But," said Dave, "if we don't know where to send the wire, how can we work the plot?"

"Leave it to me," said Hilda. "You get on your horse and ride to the Verde as fast as he'll take you. You can get there before morning and send it off on the stage. I'll write the message, sayin' that the Ranger has been badly hurt by a tree fallin' on him while fightin' a fire and that he can't live long if she ain't there to nurse him.

"I'll say they can't move him from the camp in Long Valley, and for her to come there. We'll send it to the Hotel de Flag because, if she's stoppin' at a hotel, she'll be there, and if she ain't they'll find out where she is and deliver it. Now get a wiggle on, Dave, while I write the message."

THUS it came about that, on the fourth day of the fire, the stage that left the Verde Valley every day for Jerome, where there was a telegraph, carried with it a message addressed to Helen. This reached the mining-town that evening, but the office was closed and the telegram was not sent until the fifth day. In relaying it to the Junction there was a further delay.

Consequently it was not delivered at the Hotel de Flag until late that evening. Helen and her father were not at the hotel, but staying at a house not far away. They generally took their meals at it, however, so the clerk held it for her until she appeared at noon of the sixth day. She tore it open and fainted.

Mr. Beran, as helpless as always, picked up the message and read it, while a waitress poured water all over Helen and brought her to. Beran looked owlishly at the yellow paper and sighed.

"It's too bad, isn't it?" he remarked, with genuine pity for the Ranger.

Helen snatched the message from his hand.

"Yes it is," she said. "And it's too bad to have you stand there and do nothing. You hurry up and get the wagon and horses ready. Why, he's dying all alone down there and me so far away from him! Oh, why did I ever leave him!"

"Well, he wanted you to come up here didn't he?" asked Beran.

"I don't care if he did! I should never have obeyed him if he hadn't become so determined in the last few months. Run along and fix up the wagon. I'm going there as quick as we can drive.

"Oh, *hurry*, please, father! Don't you *realize* what it means? He's dying, I tell you! Oh, God in heaven! What shall I do? What shall I do?"

Beran started toward the door.

"I'll go as fast as I can," he said soothingly.

"Do!" cried Helen. "Oh! Why, why, *why* did I ever listen to him? I might have known that something would happen as soon as he got out of my sight! Father! Father! *Will* you hurry!"

Instead of hurrying Beran turned and came back.

"I don't think we can start today," he explained. "It's too late."

"I don't care how late it is! Get the wagon! Do you hear? Oh, why didn't the Lord make you with some sense?"

Hurt by this unfilial fling, Beran went away and did his best to get everything ready for the start. But, as he had said, it

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was too late to travel far that afternoon, and though they did leave the town, they got only as far as the lumber camp a few miles south of Flagstaff. Helen had hastily written an answering telegram, with instructions to hurry it through by special messenger at whatever cost. But she fairly raved when the night forced them to stop at the camp.

There they warned her to turn back. The signs indicated snow unmistakably. The weather-wise lumbermen told her that she could never get through, and would indeed be lucky if she was not caught in the drifts and found herself unable to go either forward or back. That would mean death to her and her father.

"Then I'll die and be glad," said Helen. "He is dying and I might as well die too."

"But I don't wish to die, daughter," remarked Beran plaintively.

"I don't care," cried Helen. "Stay here if you want to, and I will go on alone. *He* wouldn't have stopped for a little snow if I needed him."

"There's the fire besides," they warned her. "They say it has gotten beyond control and is burning like time. It must have burned across the County Road by this time, and you'll find that you can't get through."

"I'll get through," she replied, "if I have to ride through the flames. *He* would have come through fire for me, I know."

"But I ain't fire-proofed, daughter," wailed Beran.

But Helen was no longer the careless and listless girl that she had been. A year of responsibility and experience had brought out all the strength of her character, and her father was now as wax in her firm hands. She faced down the lumbermen and her parent with the stubborn assertion that she would do as the Ranger would have done for her if their positions had been reversed, and ride to him if she had to ride alone, or walk if she could not ride, crawl if she could not walk, or send her soul ahead to join his if all else failed and she died on the way.

Her father, if timid, was also fatalistic, and, if he did not wish to die, he was not afraid to face death at her command. Thus when all objection proved useless, he gloomily consented to drive on in the morning.

IN THE meantime, Dave proved his incapacity for deep plotting by entirely overlooking the possibility and even probability that Helen would send a reply to the message. He had ridden back toward the forest. Moroni had sneaked up on the Mountain after Dave left and was to meet him at the junction of the road that ran into the County Highway from the Verde. This was near Pivot Rock, but if the old man was careful, he need not be discovered, as the men who were fighting the fire would be too busy to look for him.

Dave left the Verde in the evening of the fourth day's fight, for he did not care to travel in the daytime and was at the meeting-place on the following morning. He calculated that Helen would receive the message on the evening of the fourth day and would leave on the fifth. It would take her two full days of hard travel to reach the camp, and they had that much time in which to prepare the ambush.

They had little time to lose, so they took the risk of riding around the camp of the fire fighters in the daytime, though the dense smoke that hung over the Mountain made it easy to avoid detection. They struck the road farther north. From a point midway between Pivot Rock and Willow Valley, Moroni, as being one against whom no definite charge rested, went back to see if he could not procure some provisions from the fire fighters.

Helen's telegram, addressed to Bill McGhie, was sent through to Jerome and the next day was mailed to the Verde. A man took horse and rode through the night toward the camp at Pivot Rock. Night-riding is slow, and at this time, after hours of snowfall on the higher plateau, the messenger's progress was still further delayed, so that it was full day the eighth of the fire when he plowed and choked through the snow and smoke into the camp.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE STORM

THE Ranger and his men sallied from their sheltering camp to take up the struggle once more. On top of the plateau they received the full force of the wind and felt the drive of sleet in their faces. It was bitter cold and numbing, but a blanket wrapped around the knees protected each

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one, while the mousehound, after facing the gale, did as he had always done before and went back to the camp. The smoke was gone and the night was black as pitch except for the light from the gray skiff of snow that whirled on the ground.

They pushed on, the Ranger riding ahead, picking his way with care on the slippery footing. For the first time he trusted himself to the great sorrel horse, which had been brought to the camp soon after the men had gathered there. In the hot work of the preceding week that animal could not have been trusted, but there was likely to be little more of that, and as his other horses were tired, the Ranger decided to give them a little well earned rest.

They soon struck the road and found easier going in the denser timber. But it was bitter riding in that blizzard. The men behind shouted to each other above the howling gale. They could see nothing of the fire and only the snow gave them guidance on their way, lying like a white ribbon on the open road.

After a time they were hailed by some wandering scout who had lost his way and was casting about to find the road. He fell in thankfully with them and told the Ranger that Bill was somewhere ahead on the flank of the fire, fighting its westward spread, but letting it have its own way on the new front. The Ranger thought this was unnecessary information, for if any ass was on the front of that blaze his hours were numbered.

Finally they could see a red glow toward the east and headed toward it, leaving the road. It grew lighter as they picked their way and before long a dull roar, rising above the shriek of the gale, told of the terrific force the flames had attained. It saddened the Ranger to think of the fine timber thus ruined. But better the destruction of a few thousand acres than of the whole forest. And let it blaze as it would, it would find no fuel on the sheer face of the Rim. There it must die out, impotent for further harm.

Now they saw shadowy silhouettes riding or digging against the crimson background. The men pushed on, eager to get in the fight. But it was soon apparent that there were plenty of men already here to do what little remained, so the rest hurried on to get well ahead of the flank of the blaze. They got opposite it, but very soon realized that there was no head. The Ranger spurred out on a jutting point of the Rim where, for the first time, he could gain a full view of that seething hades. Other men joined him, and they looked out, even as the dawn lightened the sky over an awesome wonder.

They could see the beetling cliff, swinging away to the east in an irregular line. Below them, lying in shadow, twinkled the lights of the settlement, where at this unearthly hour the wondering inhabitants sat up to see the terrific holocaust. A sheet of flame a hundred feet high streamed upward and outward from the edge of the cliff, roaring and spitting with a frightful sound.

The steaming sap of green trees exploded in the heat, sounding like charges of dynamite. Sparks and flaming brands and curving, unattached sheets of flame which burned in the carbonized air leaped and whirled and streamed out over the valley. In the distance rolled scudding clouds of black smoke, now glowing ruddily from the rising sun. The smell of burning pitch hung over the whole weird sea of fire.

As the Ranger watched, he could see the baffled flames reach out to creep westward across the roaring wind. But the movement was so slow that they could easily beat it back. He turned back into the woods to send Bill McGhie and his men back to the camp for a rest. He rode the whole length of the fire's flank, calling the worn-out gnomes from their toil and leaving his own fresh squad to conduct the remaining fight.

Bill left with reluctance, stopping to give the details of the night's battle. The Ranger looked at him with wonder. Bill's hands and face were pot-black, blistered and raw, his clothes were tattered, full of holes burned by flying sparks and black with pitch and soot. His lips were cracked and blistered and his eyes were two red balls. He had well earned his two dollars a day.

"William!" exclaimed the Ranger in a shocked voice. "Go home and wash, you dirty thing!"

Bill shook a raw, black fist beneath his nose.

"Dirty yourself," he croaked. "Lemme tell you, young feller, you're no picter o' beauty yourself. You go an' waller in that coal hole a few minutes and I'm willin' to gamble that your girl will have hysterics when she sees you. Come on, fellers! I need a drink."

"When you're rested up," said the

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Ranger, "get the wagons started out. By tomorrow there will be snow ten feet deep in the drifts. Leave the dog and my outfit. I'll be back later."

The men rode away, reeling in their saddles but indomitable as ever. The Ranger went back to his firelines and aided in the relaxed but never ceasing fight against the ground-fires. Once more they took up the routine of plow, pick and shovel, lighting of backfires, and wild dashes through the snaky lines of flame, with great cedar boughs bouncing and dragging behind the horses. But now they could confine their efforts to more restricted areas. In the strong wind now blowing, every hour shortened their line of battle. Already the snow was banking up behind the fire and assisting the men who followed it to crush out the last sparks on the blackened waste.

At noon the Ranger was able to abandon his personal efforts and attend to the clerical work entailed by the catastrophe. He left off digging and dragging green boughs, scrubbed as much of the soot as he could from his hands, with the aid of snow, and rode up and down, getting each man's name, address and equipment, together with the number of days each had worked.

"How much do we-all get for this picnic?" asked a Verde cowpuncher, examining a seriously damaged horse with pessimism.

"Two dollars a day," answered the Ranger. "Isn't that enough?"

The cowpuncher spat thoughtfully.

"I reckon *so*," he said. "I can make money easier though, on some other job, but I wouldn't have the fun of killin' myself. Say, how much do you git?"

"Two and a half a day," answered the Ranger, "but I don't get any allowance for my horses. It's all in the day's work."

"I reckon if you save your money," said the man, "you'll be in the millionaire class some day."

The Ranger agreed and resumed his statistical labors. He started out to map the burned area roughly, and was joined toward evening by Bill. By this time the men were fighting their way through drifts against a freezing wind. They were numb and weary when the task was accomplished, and the Ranger did not feel equal to plowing through the snow to the camp. Most of the men were gone, having returned to the camp in order to pack up the equipment.

But there was a cask of water in a sheltered spot and some blankets and food had been left here. There was no lack of fire either, so near the recent conflagration. Bill and the Ranger turned in on the field of battle and slept the sleep of utter exhaustion amid the blackened spikes of burned trees and the *débris* of the conflict.

BY EARLY morning the last of the men had gone to the task of hauling the equipment to the valley, and the camp at Pivot Rock was deserted except for the supplies and horses of Bill and the Ranger. Meantime the latter had slept soundly, with no thought of worries or hardship to come, for the Ranger attached little importance to his subjective vision of the other night.

When they awoke the sun was well up, or would have been if there had been any sun visible between the lowering clouds and sleet of snow that was still falling. The Ranger had two horses and the mousehound at the camp, together with camp equipage and supplies, while Bill had a wagon there also and an extra horse.

There were grain and hay for the beasts and food for the men, enough to last a week. But as there was no longer either necessity for, or safety in, staying longer on the Mountain, they decided to go back and remove these things to the valley. They made their slow way through the fast-deepening drifts back to the road and were turning toward the north when they saw a man on horseback floundering toward them. It was nearly noon when they came upon him.

"Bill," said the Ranger, "there is bad news there. I have a hunch."

"Don't play it," said Bill, "I lost a roll thataway on three queens and an ace kicker. It's the answer to your telegram to Washington."

"Would it be so important that they would send a special messenger through this storm, if it was from Washington? I tell you there's bad news there."

The man rode up and took off his hat.

"Is there a shorthorn by the name of Bill McGhie on this yere condemned Mountain?" he demanded. "Which if there is, I want to see him and git a load offen my chest."

"What's that?" said Bill, blankly. "Me! I'm Bill McGhie. Now root in and spill your troubles."

"You be, be you?" said the man, as he

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extracted a yellow envelope from the band of his hat. "Well, you're sure a noosance to the community, you be. Why in time don't you stay where it's warm when you're expectin' telegrams and not drag a Christian out in this weather?"

"Telegram!" said Bill vacantly. "Fer me? Here, let's see that."

He turned it over and looked at the back, after deciphering the address. He seemed afraid to open it.

"Who'n time's sendin' *me* telegrams?"

"Sign the book," said the messenger. "Yer wife is a-comin' to visit you, I reckon. But you ought to stay in your camp after this and wait fer the messages, because I just had a run-in with a *hombre* who was bent on lootin' it a plenty, if he lived up to his looks."

Bill had at last torn open the message and was reading it blankly. He could make neither head nor tail of it. Helen's name at the bottom meant nothing to him, nor her exhortation to keep some "him" alive until she got there. Nor did he realize that she was telling him that she would be at the camp at Pivot Rock within a day or two. In fact, Bill did not know what the message was about at all, and more than suspected that some one was having a joke at his expense.

But the Ranger grabbed the missive from his hands and read it with a sickening heart and a cold creeping of the spine. He could not tell what it was all about any more than Bill, but he knew at once that somehow Helen had been informed that he was injured or in danger and was coming south through that awful waste of snow to lend him the aid and comfort of her presence. Just who was responsible for the deceit he did not know, but there flashed into his mind that vision of the horseman beating his way into the wind while a wagon with his love in it came to meet the rider.

"We're northward bound, Bill," he said grimly, as he placed the paper in his tunic. "And what was that about some one robbing our camp?"

This to the messenger.

"I run into a queer bird with chin whiskers and a face like a piñon nut, who was a rummagin' in the packs back there. I asked him where you was and all he did was tell me he hoped you was in a lake of brimstone where your worm wasn't goin' to die; likewise that the Lord had delivered some one into his hand and he looked like he meant me.

"It didn't seem natural thataway, fer a feller that was so peeved at you-all to be totin' off you-all's chuck, and he didn't talk polite enough fer me neither, so I run him off the reservation with my six gun and he went off on the County Road a-cussin' something frightful and accordin' to Scripter."

"Moroni Lane!" said the Ranger. "And Dave is not far away."

"And Miss Helen is a-comin' that way!" exclaimed Bill, seeing a vague light. "Oh, torments!"

"Worse than that," said the Ranger, as he faced the gale. "But we'll get to them before they die in the snow, unless——"

He did not finish the sentence, but Bill knew what he meant.

"It is twenty miles to Willow Valley," said the Ranger hopelessly, "and that fiend is lying in the snow waiting for them. Can we make it before dark?"

"We'll have to try," said Bill, "but it'll be a terrible job. But how do you know that they are in Willow Valley?"

"Never mind," said the Ranger, as he spurred his horse forward and nodded a farewell to the messenger. "It is second sight maybe. Let's get to the camp."

They pushed on as fast as they were able in the snow, not yet too deep for the horses as long as they stuck to the road. But they had difficulty in getting down into the camp, where the blown snow had drifted over everything. They made it at last, however, and went to work getting the packs on the horses. The last man had gone down perhaps an hour ago. They would need supplies for that fearful effort that was before them and it would be better to lose a precious hour or two now than inevitably perish for lack of necessities later.

They even stopped to melt snow in the Ranger's pail and scrub some of the smarting grime from their hands and faces. The Ranger donned his buckskin tunic while Bill wound mufflers around his neck and found a pair of heavy mittens. They made all the haste they could, but it was two o'clock or later before they began to move from the gully.

The snow had ceased for a time, but it was evident that the storm was not yet over. The drifts were shifting in the gale and a scud of fine snow beat in their eyes as soon as they had plowed their laborious way to

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the plateau. The Ranger was compelled to hoist the mousehound to a place on his saddle, for it was evident that the dog could not travel across the powdery snow, and the Ranger would not leave him to starve.

They drove their pack horses ahead of them and, with heads down, faced the biting wind. The Ranger's heart sank as its force struck him and he realized what task was before them. The sleet and snow stung their faces, pricking like needles.

But the raw flesh rapidly grew numb with frost, and the Ranger pulled the neck of his jersey as high as he could to meet his hat, while Bill twisted his scarf over his scarred features. He had an advantage in the warm mittens that he wore, for the Ranger's gloves were buck gantlets that grew rigid and stiff in the cold and were next to useless as warmth conservers.

A NEW difficulty presented itself before they had gone far. They were driving the pack horses before them, and these soon evinced a determination to drift to the sides of the road and turn back, refusing to face the driving gale. The men had to catch them and lead them with their ropes, slung from the saddle-horns.

Even then they hung back, dragging against the ropes and adding to the work of the saddle horses. These, too, now had to break away through the drifts in addition to carrying the men and dragging the pack animals. They went single file, the great, iron-muscled sorrel of the Ranger taking the lead.

They could not see the road in that blinding drive of flakes except immediately before them. It made no difference so far as comfort was concerned, whether it snowed or not, but when the flakes grew thicker and a glance at the sky showed them whirling downward in a new cloud, they realized that it meant further danger to them. More snow meant deeper drifts.

Even now it remains a mystery of primeval instinct how they managed to keep on the road. Though both were familiar with every foot of it in normal weather, now they had not the slightest rational idea where they were going. They could see nothing ahead but the white blanket of snow underlying the mist of sleet. On the sides the trees were dimly visible, but the gap of the highway was indistinct. They kept the wind in their faces and blundered along as best they could, somehow clinging to the road.

In the hollows they were forced to dismount and trample, with infinite effort, a pathway for the horses, since the snow was here more than belly deep. A man can work his waythrough drifts up to his neck, but let a horse's legs sink their length and he becomes helpless. Two or three times, left alone on the saddle, the mousehound fell off and vanished from view in the snow, his muffled yelps imploring aid, which was given him, salted with recriminations.

They crawled through gullies and up the leeward slopes with appalling slowness and effort, beating each foot of way against odds of wind, cold and snow. On the summits the ground was often bare, the snow being swept away before it could settle. The scudding sleet whipped past them in sheets.

The horses, even on the bare uplands, mutinied at facing the wind, and they had to spur them cruelly to keep them going. The great sorrel alone needed no incitement. He snorted and plunged into the gale, fighting it as he would have fought any rider but the man who had tamed him, tireless and fierce as some primeval monster. It took them over three hours to travel five miles from their meeting-place with the messenger.

CHAPTER XXXII

RESCUE

THEY had climbed and floundered out of gullies until exhaustion rode them like a nightmare, before they at last won to a long, high, level bench over which the road ran to Willow Valley. The deep drifts vanished; and, in spite of the blinding storm, they could now see the road.

Yet they could make little speed. Constant spurring alone forced the horses on. They pulled stubbornly against the curbs, with heads held sidewise, striving to turn tail to the wind. Even the great mustang began to rebel, and once or twice backed away until the Ranger was compelled to let him have a moment's relief by turning and standing for a breathing-space.

They won another painful ten miles before it got too dark to see the road, but they were finally forced to camp five miles short of their goal. They found dry wood and

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built a roaring blaze, thawing out their frosted limbs before they were able to unpack the horses. By this time both men were in a stupor of fatigue. Only some great force of determination, working subconsciously, kept them from collapse.

They devoured a great quantity of hot food after feeding the beasts abundantly, but they ate instinctively, with no stimulus of appetite. They were unable to feel anything, either hunger or exhaustion. They performed their tasks like automatons and rolled into their blankets to sleep like dead men, while the wind roared and the frozen trees cracked around them.

They awoke to agony that had long ago become a matter of course to them. They staggered through the tasks of the morning —the cooking, eating and packing—as if urged to them by forces foreign to themselves. Still they could think, and knew why they resumed the cruel battle. The Ranger took some sort of note of his surroundings and was glad in a dull way to find that the snow had deepened little on the bench, though it must be piling high in the hollows.

They could still see the road for a short distance in advance, while the horses, strengthened by grain and more used to the wind, faced it with greater resolution. They had often to dismount in order to walk some feeling into their numbed feet. The steel heel bands of their spurs burned like fire through the heavy leather of their boots, but they could not take them off. Buckles and chains were frozen to their feet with solid lumps of ice.

Yet they covered the five miles in fair time, considering the difficulty of moving at all. They came at last to the slope that pitched down into Willow Valley, and the Ranger, looking eagerly forward, strained his sight in vain, for he could see no more than as if a stone wall lay ahead. If Helen and her father were near, their presence was well hidden.

The Ranger writhed with an inward pain more poignant than any of his bodily distresses. What if his vision had no foundation in actuality? What if Lane had been there ahead of him, as well he might have been? Stirred to some realization of his surroundings, he plunged down into the white caldron before them.

The valley was drifted full of snow. They trampled their way by inches. They would beat and stamp a path for a few feet and then pull the floundering beasts after them. At every flounder the mousehound fell off and yelled dismally. In spite of the icy wind their efforts were so great and continuous that their underclothes grew wet with perspiration. If they paused a moment the clammy wool froze to their skins.

They were worn and haggard and half wild with the exhaustion of nine days of titanic efforts, and it was in a maniacal frenzy that they staggered and trampled their way, foot by foot, shouting hysterical encouragement to each other and leaving the complaining mousehound to follow as best he could in the path left by the horses. Bill kept up a droning monotone of curses directed at the weather and all who would venture forth in it. Nine days of almost superhuman toil was breaking both tough frames.

It was the mousehound who saved them after all. Their own shouts were growing feeble and could be heard but a little way, but the nose of the dog was sharper than eyesight and his voice more acute than the froglike croaks of the men. Some odor or sound came to his more sensitive organs. He lifted up his nose to the sky and howled a loud and dolorous note of appeal. Some one yelled an answer out of the smother, and the exhausted men had sense enough left to turn and beat their way toward the voice.

It took long minutes to cover that hundred feet, but the sight of a red glow in the mist moved them over the last fifty until they burst out in the lee of a wagon, against which the snow banked high. A camp-fire revived their failing energies and they staggered to it, too far gone to wonder at the imbecile who had camped in this death trap.

A tarpaulin stretched from the wagon made a rough tent. From beneath this came a woman and a man, who welcomed them with sympathy but without recognition. As the Ranger sank to the ground before the fire he was dimly conscious of a great relief and peace in the assurance that Helen was bending over him, alive and safe. Beran helped Bill to the fire, and in return was swept with volleys of profanity, croaked drunkenly from slit and bleeding lips.

The reviving influence of hot coffee brought the Ranger out of his stupor and he looked up into the brown and solicitous eyes that bent over him.

"Helen!" he said hoarsely to the young

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woman. "Thank the gods that you're safe!"

"Never mind that," soothed Helen. "Take some more coffee and rest."

"But I can't," he said.

His brain was working again, and the resilience bred of the toughening life he had led was giving him new strength for his needs.

"Where is Lane?"

"Lane?" repeated Helen. "He isn't here. If you could see yourself you wouldn't worry about *him*."

The Ranger groaned a little. Helen looked swiftly to see that her father and Bill were not facing them and then bent down to him. His self-confidence no longer awed her.

"I almost didn't know you," she whispered. "Oh! Why did you take such a risk; and you hurt and almost dying!"

"Me!" said the Ranger. "Dying? Some one has been fooling you. But there, there! Don't cry! I'm as right as I can be."

He raised himself painfully erect in spite of her protest, though his limbs were trembling beneath him.

"There was that message you sent. Who told you I was sick?"

"Bill did. At least the telegram was signed by him. But what brought you here? And you are really not hurt?"

The Ranger shook his head and kissed her, trying to smile. Helen stared at the figure before her, almost half persuaded that he was wounded to death and was deceiving her by some last gigantic effort of will power.

It did not much resemble the picturesque rider whose neatness had first attracted her attention. The leather of his chaps was black with soot and scorching. His tunic was buckskin, fringed like that of an old time trapper. Above it looked a face that was red and white and black in patches where burns had left it raw, where frost had blanched it and where soot had painted it. Out of the face glared eyes that were red and bloodshot, while the voice came from cracked and bleeding lips.

SOME realization of his appearance came over him. He knew what Bill looked like and saw that he also must be almost unrecognizable. He made a movement to draw away from her and gazed with shame on the smudge that marked where he had kissed her.

He was fearful of her and of himself at this moment. The pity in her eyes he misread for horror at his appearance and his heart failed him. Would she turn from this scarecrow who had played the Titan for her sake?

But she only clung to him and murmured little pitiful endearments, drawing his awful face to her own and petting him as if he were a child. She did not hesitate over the hideousness of his appearance, for she saw him through the mask of blisters and soot, as he had been when he had ridden his stately trot through the aisles of the forest.

The Ranger's strength surged back to his frame at the touch of her arms. He gazed downward into the fresh and glowing face beneath the frame of dark hair and fur hood.

"I suppose I do look like the devil," he remarked, "but I don't care. Your own face is dirty now."

"Heavens!" cried Helen. "Why didn't you tell me? I never would have kissed you if I had thought of that."

The remarks of Bill McGhie who, refreshed by his share of the coffee, was expressing his opinion of Mr. Beran, brought the Ranger back to a sense of his surroundings.

"Why does any unmentionable degenerate with the brains of a chipmunk want to camp in a place like this?" Bill was saying forcefully. "You condemned, locoed, townbred idiot, don't you-all *sabe* enough to get on high ground and keep out of drifts? How in time d'ye expect to pull out o' here?"

"This is more sheltered from the wind," explained Beran apologetically.

"And will be fifteen feet deep in snow before two days are gone," said the Ranger. "We must get out of here as soon as possible. The longer we stay the harder it will be to break a way out."

Spurred by the wine of Helen's presence and safety, the Ranger felt his strength equal to one more effort. They turned from the demoralizing comfort of the fire to set about breaking a way to the top of the plateau. It was necessary to go north, for by this time the drifts to the south would be impassable, while they might hope that the high ridges and flats between the valley and Flagstaff would be swept comparatively free of snow by the wind.

It was questionable whether they could

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drag the wagon out of Willow Valley. The snow was heaped in places higher than their heads and drifting deeper. If they would win safely to the higher ground it behooved them to be about it without further delay.

This was emphasized to Mr. Beran, who began to feel aggrieved at Bill's aspersions on his intellect. He didn't know they were going to be stalled, for the snow had not been deep when they had left Stoneman's Lake the previous morning. This confirmed the Ranger in his hope. There was a permanent Ranger Station, as he knew, at Clark's Valley, and the road would certainly be open between that point and Flagstaff.

They stripped the packs from the horses and piled them in the wagon, while with the pack ropes they made shift to harness the five horses which could be driven. The Ranger's horse would not submit to the ropes and was led behind.

Then the three men began their task of trampling down a path for the rig. They had an old shovel. This they wielded in turns, throwing out a portion of the snow and beating the rest down to a semblance of solid footing. When a few feet had been cleared away they led the horses into the breach.

It took the strength of the five to drag the heavily laden vehicle through the snow, in which it sank to the axles. Once more their toil caused the perspiration to run, and steam from the heated bodies hung round them like an aura. Every half hour they were forced to retreat to the fire and thaw their numbed feet. As soon as they ceased violent movement, the chill settled on them.

Helen would have aided in the trampling, but they forbade it, setting her to keep a supply of hot coffee boiling on the fire. The sweat running down the grimed faces of Bill and the Ranger gathered soot and hung in frozen, black beads on their ragged beards. Blisters and raw spots were stung by the salt excretion, and ached dully where the frost struck in.

But the two were so used to pains and aches by this time that the throbbing agony was hardly noticeable to them. Haggard, grimed, with drawn faces and red eyes, the two looked more like devils than men. Yet their iron nerves and sinews bore up somehow under the torture of effort. As the soot worked from their skins their appearance improved somewhat.

When the Ranger staggered to the fire to get a cup of coffee and renew his failing vitality, Helen looked at him and wondered. He was at last fighting his great battle against the forces of the air and showing himself indomitable. Hideous he might be, but he had the glamour of giant will and strength to cover his wounds, and she saw nothing of his ugliness. He stooped to the snow and washed his smarting face in it, cleansing from it the greater part of the grime. Then Helen crept to his side and put her arms around his neck.

"Poor boy!" she said. "You will kill yourself!"

The Ranger looked down at her sweet face, and his own drawn and agonized features softened marvelously. Their lips met and clung a moment, and the cracking muscles of the man were refreshed by the thrill of great delight that ran through his frame. And Helen felt all her old discontent, all her rebellion against fate, melt away forever in a feeling of peace and security.

As she looked at the white waste around them, she was sure that they must die there in the caldron of snow, but she felt no fear nor regret. It would be more happiness than she had ever known, to die with the arms of her lover around her.

But the Ranger, the force of his joy surging in him, was not the man to die when the goal was at hand. He kissed Helen again and sprang away gaily to his work. Beran was showing signs of weakening, and the Ranger heartened him with wit and encouragement which he badly needed.

They toiled on without rest, except at short intervals, literally winning their way by inches. When they reached the *arroyo* through which a stream ran during the rainy season, the Ranger, working in the front, fell through the snow without warning and was hauled out with difficulty, whereupon he set to work fiercely to clear a path across the ditch.

The last hundred feet of drift was the deepest, but they could at last see the notch of the road as it topped the slope from the valley. With hope renewed they toiled like beavers and, as they gradually crept up the slope, found the snow become shallower at last.

Night came on them, but they lit the lantern which was in the wagon and dug and

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dragged their way triumphantly to the crest in the dark of the early night. In a few minutes they had stretched tent and tarpaulin, and had a huge fire blazing in the lee of the shelter. They had hardly strength left to eat the meal that Helen cooked, and afterward to roll themselves in their bedding, where they fell asleep and were lost to all consciousness. But Helen, in the teepee tent, dreamed the night away and smiled in her sleep, despite the primitive discomforts of her position.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE LAST OF DAVE LANE

THE Ranger was roused in the morning with extreme difficulty and showed marked symptoms of lassitude during the breakfast and the labor of packing that followed. His face was alternately flushed and pale, except in the burned spots that stood out like blotches at all times. Helen was anxious, but he assured her that he was all right and insisted on mounting his great horse when the preparations were completed, and riding in the van, though they urged him to get in the wagon. He was thoughtful, when his mind would refrain from wandering idly, reflecting on the meaning of their predicament.

Helen thought that the telegram to her was merely the result of spite on the part of Miss Petersen and attached no other importance to it. The Ranger, knowing that Dave had been traced to the Mountain, and that he must have gone down into the valley before the snow grew deep, was inclined to think that it came from the outlaw. Then, too, he knew that Moroni Lane was on the Mountain, and supposed it likely that his two enemies had joined forces.

He was further convinced that Dave had had a hand in the affair from the recollection of that strange vision which had proved so prophetic, though it would seem that it had deceived him in regard to the presence of the murderer near Willow Valley. Yet there might be an explanation of this. In the smother of snow and sleet, if Dave, as he would undoubtedly have done, had kept to the high ground and skirted the valley, he might well have passed the travelers without ever knowing that they were in the vicinity. At any rate, they had escaped him, and it was probable that he would never be heard from again.

The snow was falling much less rapidly than on the day before, and the wind had abated considerably. At times the fall ceased altogether. This brought the liability of a fresh danger, for if it cleared up and the sun came out; a few minutes of its light, even in the Winter and at an altitude of nearly eight thousand feet, would so soften the snow, which would freeze again, that a crust would be formed through which the horses would break. But the sky remained leaden and they found the weather in every way favorable to their escape.

The Ranger felt a great listlessness creeping upon him. His head grew dull and heavy. At times he felt as if he were burning up and a moment later would shake with the sharp spasm of a chill. He knew that he was in the grip of a fever, but as long as the deadly, shooting pain of pneumonia was absent he was totally indifferent to his condition.

Helen looked at him as he rode unconsciously in his old attitude, with his hands crossed on the saddle-horn and his head bowed. But now it was sunk upon his chest, the muscles of his neck giving it little support. He swayed in his saddle at times, though the pace was a slow walk, and it seemed that only the force of instinct enabled him to keep his seat.

Helen begged him in vain to ride in the wagon. He shook his head and kept his place in the van. One thing he had done that seemed also the prompting of habit. On saddling his horse in the morning he had taken his six shooter from the wagon and buckled it in its old place behind the flap of his chaps, just back of the knee.

The mousehound, finding that the snow was shallow on the ridge, was running beside his master and amusing himself by plowing the snow with his nose and romping in it. He ran in circles, dashing out into the deeper piles and rolling in them like a puppy. At last he came upon a drift that had formed on the side of a rock and plunged at it. But he stopped abruptly not more than a few feet from it and sniffed inquiringly. Then he cautiously drew nearer and began to dig the snow away, whining in a peculiar manner.

The Ranger took no notice, but Bill McGhie was curious. He got off his horse and called to the others to stop. The

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Ranger looked on listlessly while Bill kicked the snow away from the mound.

"Humph!" said Bill, as a black something showed through the white shroud. "You-all better drive on, Miss Helen."

But Helen was watching the thing with horror on her face. Bill hesitated and then shrugged his shoulders. He was accustomed to women who knew what death was and did not calculate the effect this sight would have on the girl. He tossed the snow aside, assisted by the mousehound, and soon exposed the frozen features of a man. The Ranger awoke to a gleam of interest. He looked eagerly upon the stark, gray face and then uttered a muttered exclamation.

"It's Moroni Lane!" he said thickly. "Now where the deuce is Dave?"

But the mound held no other body, and Bill hastily covered this one with the snow again. It was not a pleasant sight. Helen had covered her face with her hands and was near to fainting. There had been a rifle in the dead man's hands and it was probable that she had escaped a shot from it.

"There's no brimstone here," chuckled the Ranger callously. He hardly realized the fate had that overtaken his enemy. "Accused me of having a worm, he did! Serves him right! He's got a worm himself."

Bill took notice of him now. There was no doubt that the Ranger was sick. But he refused the proffered ministrations peevishly and swore that he was as able to ride as ever. Helen began to cry quietly. He sagged listlessly in his saddle and took no notice. Bill, disgusted at the mousehound for digging up such an unpleasant object as the body of Moroni Lane, tossed the beast into the wagon and bade him ride there.

They came out upon open, almost treeless country after a while and rode along a high, smooth ridge with little effort. The snow was shallow here, and as long as the wind did not blow traveling was easy enough. They could not make a great deal of speed because the wagon was heavy, but the struggle of the day before was a thing of the past. At this rate they would get to Clark's Valley by nightfall.

There was something black that seemed to be part of a rock ahead of them. The Ranger found himself looking at it and idly noting the queer, humped contour. There was no thought in his wearily throbbing brain, but he kept his eyes on that queer outcrop. It seemed to move, but the fact was not particularly interesting to him.

Something slid from the rock and moved quickly to another black object near by. Then it climbed up the side of this latter formation and took the shape of a man on horseback. Now Bill saw it too, and uttered a hoarse shout of alarm. Helen looked ahead and perceived a man, silhouetted against the snow, looking from under his hand and reining a lithe horse around.

"It's Dave!" swore Bill, and fumbled for the six shooter, which was not at his belt.

The man on horseback loped a few yards toward them and then hesitated. It was as if he had been surprised at their appearance from an unlooked-for direction, and in unexpected strength. He might have intended to ride up to them, but if so he changed his mind abruptly. Instead, he raised something to his shoulder, and without warning fired at them.

Helen cried out sharply, and the mousehound gave a yell of mortal agony. The Ranger awoke abruptly from his trance and stared backward in the direction of the cry. He saw Helen lurch forward.

Then the whole world of white went red in his eyes. His fever-stricken brain could barely grasp an idea, but there was one obsession which fastened upon it and would not be displaced. There, in front of him, upon the long, level ridge swept bare of snow, was his enemy who had done this thing. Well for him if the black beast he rode was as fast and enduring as Sleipnir, the steed of Odin, for he would need ride fast and far to escape the thing that followed him.

THE Ranger had driven the spurs home in the flanks of the Pivot Rock sorrel, and with an inarticulate cry had leaped forward toward the figure on the black horse. For a moment it seemed that Dave would await his coming. He raised his rifle, but nervous from the report of that other shot, the flighty thoroughbred leaped forward as the motion was made. The weapon exploded and the bullet shot harmlessly into the air. The plunging horse reared and fled north along the ridge, out of all control.

So sudden was the movement that Dave

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lurched sidewise almost out of the saddle, and retained his seat only by sheer strength of thigh. He clutched at the reins and in so doing let loose his hold of the rifle, which slid to the ground. If he had had any idea of facing the Ranger it was now gone. One glance he cast behind him at that storming rush, and then he gathered his reins and drove home his own spurs.

Bill McGhie had also dashed forward, but he might as well have attempted to catch an aeroplane. Yet his attempt perhaps decided Dave on flight, lest he should have to face two men. But Bill soon pulled up and turned back, for far ahead of him the black thoroughbred flitted like a swallow, and a hundred yards behind it the great sorrel leaped like a wind-driven flame.

The Ranger rode no longer as he had ridden before. Instead, he crouched low over the horn of his saddle and lashed the flanks of his horse with bloody rowels. The fever in his head had settled on that one wild desire to reach and tear the man who fled before him. His horse felt the goad and screamed with rage and fright as the steel gouged him. Never before had he been driven by the spur. Seldom, indeed, had he ever felt it.

So now he leaped against the bit and lashed into the air with all the power of his huge, driving loins. If the Ranger had not been one who, sick or well, rode like a Cossack, by instinct, those terrific springs would have shaken him from the seat. But he clung to the brute and yelled as the red back surged beneath him.

Smoothly and swiftly ran the black ahead of him, and like the rush of the surf stormed the great mustang. The powdery snow puffed out from the pounding feet, and the rocks rang like bells as the iron-shod hoofs spurned them.

The man in front looked behind him and laughed. He knew that the heavy beast behind could not catch his slender-limbed pet. And what was a grass-fed mustang to hope to outlast a scion of Derby winners? He saw how the sorrel plunged wildly forward and sneered at the effort made.

Yet the Ranger called shrilly to his beast and gripped the reins well forward, near the bit chains. The spurs were still tapping the flanks, but not with those first fierce jabs. Urged as he had never been before, the great horse felt the skill of the light hands and gathered himself together, tucking his great flanks well under him. His head went out against that steadying bit and he caught the rhythmic swing of his speed.

Faster and faster ran the black shadow in the front, and longer and longer grew the stride of the red demon that followed. Mile after mile over the light snow they rushed. Long ago the wagon and the horses had vanished from sight. Swinging along the level ground, plunging through the drifts against the rises, tearing down the slopes, on fled the black and after him rushed the sorrel.

But now Dave no longer laughed as he looked behind him. His horse was running true to his blood, but he gained not an inch on that devil that ran behind. The outlaw settled himself in his saddle and used the spur. He squeezed a fraction more speed from his mount, but a quick glance over his shoulder showed that he did not gain by it.

No living beasts could keep that pace and survive. Yet they fled with no slackening for three full miles. Then Dave felt his horse slowing, though it was barely perceptible. If the steel-sinewed runner faltered, what must the mustang be doing? Once more, expecting to see the sorrel faltering hopelessly in his stride, Dave glanced over his shoulder.

The red beast was storming on as if he had run only his first furlong. The hundred-yard lead had narrowed to eighty. The outlaw felt a sudden panic fear, and drove home his spurs. When he looked behind again he knew that the sorrel was also slowing, for he had almost regained his lost ground.

But try as he would he could gain no more, and at every falter of his horse he saw that the tireless horse behind had gained a few feet more. Gradually both slowed, but always it was the black that had to be kept to the even run while the sorrel ran as if well in hand. His greater stride and reach enabled him to cover the same space with less effort. If he had the heavier rider, he had also the greater bulk to carry the excess weight.

The hundred yards lessened inevitably to eighty, to seventy, to sixty. Dave began to feel for his six shooter in anticipation of the coming need. How many miles they had covered he could not guess, but it seemed that he had been rushing through space for hours. Past Stoneman's Lake

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they stormed, and the Ranger was no more than fifty yards behind.

Dave was tempted to try a shot, but he reflected that a hit would be a miracle at that pace, and left his six shooter in its holster. He would wait until a shot was sure. Perhaps the sorrel would falter at last, and show the lack of blood in him. Yet when he looked again the great horse was still leaping into the bit and answering every shrill cry of exultation from his rider.

Now Dave began to feel a sickening, paralyzing fear creep upon him. There was some note in those inhuman cries that forced panic upon him. The shrill voice was that of a maniac, and the glimpse he caught of his pursuer was confirmatory of the suspicion. The bloodshot eyes glaring out of a face that was alternately pale and red, the writhing lips from which flecks of blood flew, were those of a madman. He yielded to his fear and snapped his weapon at the Ranger. The latter yelled a laugh.

Dave's horse leaped as the pistol cracked and then began to stagger in his stride. His tail was flapping up and down, and it was evident that he was at the end of his strength. Dave spurred him savagely and looked behind. The Ranger was sitting a little more upright and slipping his rope from the strap at his saddle-horn.

The black plunged under the spur and his feet slipped. He caught them with a last effort and ran frantically for a few moments. The man gashed him and screamed oaths, but the storming hoofs of the sorrel were close upon him now.

He fired frantically at the terrible face that loomed to one side of him and heard the laugh of the maniac again. There was a line of weaving rope that swung in circles around the grim features. Dave fired again. Then a snaky loop slipped over his head and he was whirled up and outward into a crashing unconsciousness.

THE sun beat a way through the leaden clouds for a little while and then went back into hiding as if sickened by the sight it looked upon. Through the sparse, gaunt trees that streaked with red and green the white expanse of the snow, its light fell upon a brown-red beast upon whose back weaved a shouting figure. As the horse plunged on across the snow something at the end of a taut line that stretched across the rider's thigh bounced and flopped over the rough surface, leaping soddenly across rocks and plowing through hummocks from which the powdery snow flew in a silver mist.

Back upon the ridge a black horse whose sides were streaked with red and white lurched forward to shaking knees and rolled over in the snow. The man who dragged that black bundle at his rope's end shook a pistol in the air and fired at the inert mass behind him. There was a dark stain that grew larger on the side of the rider, but he appeared to feel it not at all, though it was caused by his own blood.

CHAPTER XXXIV

BILL GETS AN ORDER

THE Ranger woke to consciousness and turned over, feeling the hurt of his scarcely healed wound as he did so. A man with a pointed beard was bending over him and feeling his pulse.

"Where the deuce is Helen?" he asked with asperity.

"She's asleep," said the man. "How do you feel?"

"Say!" said the Ranger. "Who the deuce are you, and how did you get here through the snow?"

"I'm the doctor, and there isn't any snow," said the man. "You've been sick."

"Sick!" repeated the Ranger. "Honest now, doc, don't tell me I've been dreaming things. Wasn't there a fire and a snowstorm and general trouble?"

"You haven't been dreaming," replied the doctor, smiling, "though if I hadn't good proof of the facts I'd never believe that you could have gone through what you did and come out alive. But you are all right now. The sickness wasn't much—a touch of tonsillitis aggravated by general exhaustion and excitement—and the bullet wound wasn't dangerous alone. The combination, in the condition to which you had been reduced, was almost enough to kill you."

"Doc!" said the Ranger. "Just let me get this straight, will you? You said a minute ago that Helen was sleeping?"

"She's nearly worn out from nursing you," agreed the physician. "She hasn't hardly left you for over two weeks."

"But I saw her fall—I am beginning to remember some of it now! That fellow

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shot and she was hit. Wasn't she hurt badly then?"

"I don't understand you," said the doctor. "Miss Beran wasn't shot that I know of. You were, however, though the ball fortunately glanced on a rib. You had better turn over and go to sleep again."

"If I've slept two weeks," retorted the Ranger, "I can stand a few minutes' wakefulness now. Where is Bill McGhie, and why in time don't you put some strength back in my bones?"

"Mr. McGhie will look after you while I'm gone," said the doctor, as he picked up his bag. "The only way I can put any strength in *you*, young man, is by prescribing quiet." As he went out of the door, Bill, as gloomy as ever, came in.

"Say!" remarked Bill reproachfully. "You done played hob, you did."

"I want to see Helen," said the Ranger peevishly.

"Well, you ain't a-goin' to see her till she gets good and rested," replied Bill.

The Ranger lay quiet for a while. Then—

"William, tell me, like a good soul, what the deuce *did* happen after Helen was shot."

"She wasn't shot," said Bill. "It was that ornery dad-burned pup o' yours. Which it served the measly flea roost right, that's whatever."

"But, Bill, I heard her scream and saw her fall. I remember coming out of the valley that night and starting next morning, though I can't get it all straight. Seems to me I was sick then. I had a terrible sore throat, I remember. Then something happened, and a little later we saw Dave and he shot Helen. At least I thought he did. After that everything is blank."

"I'm glad of that," said Bill. "If you'd done that in yer right senses I'd never 'a' shook hands with you again. I don't blame you none fer killin' him, but I sure wish you'd take a more civilized way of doing your butchery hereafter."

"Killing who?" asked the Ranger. "Was the mousehound killed?"

"The mousehound was killed by Dave, and when Miss Helen reaches over to pick the poor devil up I reckon you thought it was her. Then you-all run Dave's horse plumb to death while you was as crazy as a June bug. Likewise you ropes Dave plumb out of his saddle and drug him five mile over the road to Clark's Valley, shootin' holes in what was left of him.

"Which, when I gets up ahead of the wagon that night, you was lyin' across the door of the Ranger Station, plumb senseless, while your hoss had gone scared at what was hangin' to the rope and just naturally tangled himself among the trees until he broke his neck. The dog is dead, Dave and his hoss are dead, Moroni Lane is dead, and that red devil you-all was ridin' is dead. It's a mystery to me that *you* ain't dead too."

"Who shot me?" asked the Ranger, his face getting a little gray as this chapter of horrors was recited.

"I reckon Dave did," said Bill. "Unless your own gun did it. But there wasn't no marks of powder burns and so I allow it was Dave."

The Ranger lay silent for a long time. Then he whispered. "Does Helen know?"

"She knows Dave is dead."

Bill likewise lowered his voice to a whisper as if fearful that the sleeping girl might overhear. "I got to the Station in time to hide the rest of that mess and I never told her how he died. It was all cleaned up when she got there. And I ain't goin' to tell her nohow."

The Ranger shuddered. "Neither will I," he said. "Where are we now?"

"We brought you into Flagstaff next day, though you was as batty as a bass fish. The medic fixed you up all right, and said there wasn't nothin' the matter with you but a bad case of tonsillitis, mixed with a bullet hole and a mixed diet of smoke and snow and cinders and that tired feeling. Which I allow that was enough to keep you in bed a spell."

After a while they heard Helen's voice in the hall. "Bill," she called before she opened the door, "is he all right?"

"Yes'm," said Bill, rising and going to the door. "I reckon he's even a little better. But he's done quit ravin' about you."

"What!" cried Helen as she flew through the door, convinced that this queer shift in the Ranger's delirium portended disaster. "Why—what—— Oh, my dear! My dear!"

She flew to the bedside and fell on her knees beside him, taking the wan head in her arms and holding his emaciated but clean cheek to her own soft one.

"Bill," said the Ranger, "you get out of here and don't come back for some time."

THE END.

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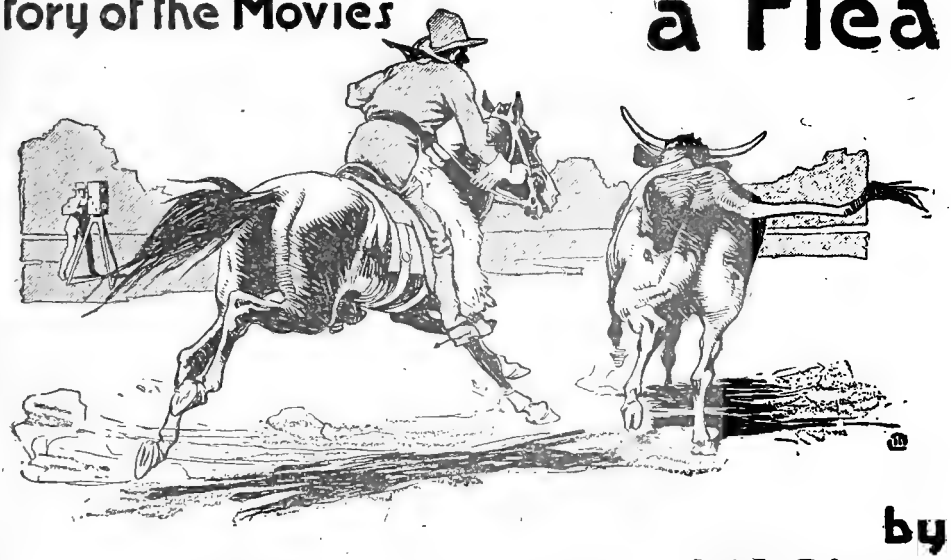
A Woodtick, an Ant, or a Flea

A Story of the "Movies"



by J. U. Giesy

THE Kineto-color people maintain a Western corps of performers, with headquarters in the City of the Angels, and its management lies in the hands of Bobby Twiggs.

This may seem rather nice for Bobby to the casual observer, for the Kineto-color concern is one of the largest moving-picture houses in the country, and you can see their pictures wherever a "movie" flaunts its signs around the wide, wide world. But like many a surface seeming, it is somewhat deceiving. Bobby stood high with his employers as a man of genius in producing film; but he had his troubles.

Scenarios were not the least of these. In those salad days when Twiggs first rose to his present position, he had, under the first enthusiastic spur of advancement, constructed one or two picture-play plots which made a decided hit when released. And his accomplishment did not go unnoticed by the man higher up. Time and again since then, Ketchem, General Manager of the Kineto-color, had called upon him to build other plots when they were needed, until by a sort of tacit consent the work had become a part of Bobby's position, and no small one at that.

Ordinarily Twiggs didn't object. He liked to plot a story and visualize it with living figures before the camera's eye; see it recorded upon the film, and go forth to please the multitude.

Ordinarily he was content to manage the affairs of the Western troupe, engage and discharge actors, settle disputes over parts, look after the details of production, hold consultations over stage properties, sign pay checks and other incidental papers, dictate telegrams and letters, scout for locations, instruct participants in their parts and the gestures and emotions they were to register; in short, to attend to the thousand and one things entailed by his job—and write scenarios, which would entail a thousand and one other details.

It was only when Ketchem, inspired by some idea of business policy, shot him a rush order, leaving all details to his imagination, that he suffered a verbal ebullition, and boiled over in temporary rebellion.

That was what happened one July morning, while Limpy Flynn, star camera man

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of the concern, transferred temporarily to the Western troupe, was loafing in Bobby's office. Limpy hadn't meant to be transferred. It had just "happened."

Some weeks before he had returned from a successful trip abroad, where he had put a part of the Balkan War on a film, and Ketchem had offered him a vacation. Limpy was rather pleased with the idea at first. He decided to go West. He had been a jockey before he turned a camera crank, and he had heard that the racing game still held on the Pacific coast. Thither he went.

Ten days after he left Ketchem he came into Bobby's office with his odd, halting limp, relic of a fall from a racing-horse, and requested him to wire the Manager that he wanted to go back to work. The size of the matter was that he wasn't happy away from his beloved machines, which had grown to be an obsessing interest in his life.

Ketchem promptly wired Bobby to give Flynn a machine and turn him loose. Bobby was delighted, for he had heard of Flynn's capacity for making film.

On the particular morning in question a messenger sauntered in with a telegram, stuck his receipt book before Bobby, and sauntered out. Bobby ripped the cover from the enclosure, gave the latter a glance, and began to froth at the mouth.

"He thinks I'm a freak," he growled, tossing the yellow slip on his desk and turning to scowl at Flynn. "Wires me to pull a Western story at once and put something *new* into the thing. There ain't anything new in Western films. It's all been done. I could take twenty cut-ins from as many Western dramas, string 'em together, an' you couldn't tell the result from a new one.

"Rats! What's got into Ketchem, anyway? Well, I suppose I've got to build him something, an' I bet I come a flivver. Lord, but I'm gettin' tired of this job."

He swung back to his desk with a grunt.

"You can't tell from the motion of a dog's paw whether he's scratchin' fleas or woodticks," said Limpy around a large cigar stuck into his small face—one of Bobby's cigars.

"You—what?"

Twiggs swung around for an inspection of the source of so oracular a remark.

"Meanin'," continued the oracle, emitting smoke, "that maybe if you examined the dog, you could find it 't wasn't neither. It might be a red ant."

"If that cigar's too strong for you——" began Bobby. Flynn grinned.

"Keep your shirt on, Mr. Twiggs," he admonished. "I was just thinkin' that maybe we *could* dig up somethin' new. Maybe you an' me ain't wise to everything on the dog, like. Maybe if we scouted around——

"Now there's that feller Art McLeod, what you got here. I been talkin' to him a lot. He's lived all over these parts. Why don't you git Art in an' give him th' third degree? Maybe there's a bet down thet's been sleepin'. You can't tell."

Twiggs grabbed a box of cigars from his desk and extended it to Limpy.

"'Nough said. Take a pocketful of smokes an' go send Art to me," he requested. "I'll see what I can find under his hair. Then go thread up your boxes. Ketchem says he wants this quick."

Limpy modestly helped himself to two cigars, nodded, hitched himself out of his chair and so to the door.

"You'll git it," he opined. "A man allers kin, ef he has to. I'll send Art up."

SOME time later the click of heels and the jingle of spur chains warned Bobby that some one was coming. The door opened without ceremony and a young man sauntered into the room.

He was a visualized image of what a cowpuncher should be. He wore a shirt, a knotted silk scarf, a pair of leather wristlets, a beadwork belt from which depended a beadwork holster containing a "gun," and a pair of angora chaps. Furthermore, he was smoking a cigarette, which drooped from a corner of his rather large and passively smiling mouth.

"Want me, Bobby?" inquired the newcomer, his cigarette jerking up and down with each word.

"Sit down, Art," said Twiggs. "You've been posing around here as the chief rider, bandit leader, scout, bad man, horse thief, cattle rustler, hero, villain, and Hairbreadth Harry, for quite a time. Now Ketchem's got me in a hole and you've got to rope me out. Say—is there anything in this Western stuff we haven't pulled that we could get into a film?"

"Lots of it," declared McLeod, pinching out his cigarette and beginning another.

"Encouraging but indefinite," said Bobby. "Elucidate."

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"Bulldoggin', fer one thing," said McLeod.

"I was speaking of cattle, and men, and horses, girls, and riding," said Bobby.

"These is them," returned McLeod, unmindful of grammatical trammels. "Also runnin'."

"Elucidate some more," demanded Twiggs.

"Well, say—— Grandma's cat, Bobby! Didn't you never see no bulldoggin'?" inquired Art. "I thought you was up on most of this stuff, old timer. Bulldoggin' ain't nothin' but a way of catchin' a steer; though it might make a pretty good bit in a picture for all that.

"It's a sort of cross between football an' a roundup. You turn a steer loose an' take after him on horseback. When you get clost enough to him, you jump offen the horse, run alongside th' steer, an' grab him by th' horns, an' throw him. That's all. They pull it in most of th' Wild West shows, an' ridin'-contests, an' sech, nowadays. I don't know if it's ever been put on a film or not."

"Rough work—we'd have to get a regular. Know anybody we could sign?"

"What's the matter with me?" queried McLeod.

"D'ye ever do it?" said Twiggs quickly.

"Ef you'll come up to my room, I'll show you some medals as says I did, anyway," Art proffered. "You want to remember I worked for my living before I hit you people, old timer. I was a *real* punch and buster onct, Bobby. That's why I get paid what I do. I thought I explained that when you guv me this job. I kin tell a bronc from a cow without tryin' to ride it."

"All right, Mister Man," Twiggs interrupted. "You'll get a chance to make good on that. I see you're all dolled up for that run we were going to make this afternoon. You can go play till I'm ready to start. I've got to dope up this stuff for Ketchem, no matter what waits. Beat it, Art, and let me think."

"Go as far as you like," said McLeod, and sauntered out.

Outside the door, though, he paused. Coming down the hall of the building which housed the offices and producing-studios of the Kineto-color's Western division was a thing of beauty, and therefore a joy forever.

At least that is how Art McLeod, champion rough rider, characterized her in his thoughts. In ordinary, everyday life she was known as Marjorie Camp.

Having rescued her from a camp of hostile redskins, saved her from drowning in a ragged surf, carried her from a burning building, snatched her from the back of a runaway horse, preserved her from the pursuit of Mexican insurrectos, and in other ways conserved her life, liberty, and welfare, it is not strange that McLeod had learned that her hair was brown and of a surprising softness and thickness; that her eyes were blue and veiled by long silky lashes; that her lips were soft and inviting in contour; or that her figure was both supple and strong; or that he had at times forgotten the exact proportion between acting natural and artificial in his dreams.

So far, indeed, had he lapsed in his part as to suggest to the little leading lady that he was not acting at all so far as his feelings were concerned, and to request that she ratify his position by agreeing to sign a life engagement with him. To this Miss Camp had replied that while not averse to him as a playing partner, she preferred to let matters stand as they were in all other respects, and would thank him to behave himself.

This McLeod proceeded to do in very much the manner a chidden pup adopts toward its master, following around from hour to hour, lifting dumb eyes as if asking for a loving word. From time to time he preferred his request with a humbleness negative in itself, and entirely unlike his attitude toward men or even other women; which may explain why he flushed as she approached today.

"Howd'ye do, Miss Marjorie," he greeted, removing his wide-brimmed hat.

"Hello, Art," said Miss Camp, coming to a halt. "Is Bobby busy?"

"He's dopin' out a play thing for us to work," said Art, fiddling with his hat brim.

"Goodness! A new one? What's he going to make us do now?" inquired Miss Camp.

"I dunno about the rest of you, but he's goin' to make me bulldog a steer," said Art.

"Bulldog a steer?" repeated Miss Camp. "What's that?"

"Just a way of catchin' 'em without a rope; grabbin' them by th' horns an' throwin' them down, an' holdin' them there. I done a lot of it now and then." He grinned.

"I wisht a feller could catch th' girl he wanted thataway. It would save a lot of wordy rope-slingin', all right. Say, Marjorie——"

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But Miss Camp didn't let him finish.

"Art McLeod," she exclaimed, flushing, "aren't you ashamed? And now that you've brought it up again, I want to tell you that you've got to quit following me around like a—a—a tame goose. You've got the whole troupe talking, and it isn't a bit nice for me. You may be a good rider, and able to bulldog steers; but you don't know anything about women, and you can't bulldog a girl."

With head up, she swept past him and entered Bobby's office, slamming the door.

McLeod turned away with a shake of the head and journeyed down the hall till he came to an open door beyond which Limpy Flynn was busily investigating the internal mechanism of a small black box to see, if he could, what particular malady kept it from proper working. Being in need of personal society, Art stopped at the door and leaned against its frame. Limpy glanced up.

"Hello, Kid," he invited. "Come in an' spill a few words. You seen Mr. Twiggs?"

"Oh, yes." Art sat down on a box and drooped in dejection, elbows on knees.

"Then why them tears?" quizzed Limpy. "Couldn't you an' him dig up nuthin' a-tall? Gosh, you gotter! Ketchem'll have a fit if you don't come through with somethin'. Say, this is serious, bo. Think—take a good long think."

"Oh, we got the thing for Ketchem all right," Art cut in.

"Then for the love of Mike what's the matter?" Limpy's intonation indicated that nothing else could be the matter.

Art got out his "makings" and began to build a cigarette.

"Here! Quit it! Want to blow th' place up, smokin' in here?" objected Flynn.

Art put away his tobacco with a bad grace.

"I don't know as I'd care much," he returned. "I wisht steers was like women."

Limpy chuckled.

"I gotcha, Arthur; only you mean you wish women was like steers. You know all about steers, but as fer skirts—not—not a-tall. I was just remarkin' to Mr. Twiggs that you can't tell if it's a ant or a flea that's botherin' a dog from th' way th' mutt scratches——"

ART grinned as he interrupted—

"What d'ye mean yuh lost yer——"

"No!" snapped Limpy. "I hain't lost no dog; but you've lost yer goat to a skirt, bo, an' yer in bad. I'm wise, an' so's all th' rest of th' gang. You may be the real stuff when it comes to cattle, but you don't know women, buddy.

"Maybe you don't know it, but molls is human; an' like other humans, th' things they want wust is th' things they can't have. You can't git nowheres moonin' around after a doll like a mangy pup. That ain't th' right play.

"There's three ways to git a girl plumb crazy fer you. Jist jump in an' grab her; or make her like you, an' then act kinder like you couldn't see her; or else git her so sorry for you she wants to sorter take keer of you for a spell. They'll all fall for one of them ways, dependin' on th' man."

"A fat chance I'd have of makin' her like me," said Art morosely.

"Oh—I don't know, Arthur," returned Flynn, poking away at his box. "I ain't sure but she's half way stuck on you now. I notice she don't pester Twiggs to put somebody else in your parts."

"I reckon she likes Twiggs better 'n me," opined McLeod, still more doleful. "Bob's sure a good looker—brown hair an' eyes, an' a straight nose, an' a swell dresser; an' look at me! I got hair like a dun mule, an' eyes like a faded gray shirt, an' a mouth for pie; an' my nose hes got its back up over somethin' all th' time, like a bent hinge. I uster think noisy togs was swell, but I dunno any more. There's sure class to Bob, an' Marjorie's more in his style. She's in there with him now.

"Nope, Limpy, I reckon I can't see no pitcher of my drivin' Marjorie crazy with my amazin' beauty; an' as fer that rough stuff of grabbin' th' girl, th' feller who throws a rope over her will think he's tied on to a limited train. I ain't got th' nerve."

"Well," rejoined Limpy, "ef it wasn't a flea, or a ant what was botherin' th' mutt, maybe it might be a woodtick; in which case he'd be needin' pity. I reckon if you can't make either of them first two plays, you got to make that dame sorry for you."

"Ain't I tried that?" flared Art.

"You can't do it by goin' around droolin'," said Limpy. "She's a live-wire kid, an'

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your briny sniffles gives her a sort of short circuit."

"We-e-ll?"

Art's tones became slightly more snappy.

"Well," Flynn considered, "you might break your fool neck in makin' a fall."

McLeod snorted.

"A lot of good her carin' would do a man with a busted neck!"

"That's so," admitted Flynn. "Well, I was only suggestin'. You think up a way; I ain't no Cupid. But for th' love of Mike, ef you're goin' to be in th' pitchers I make, try an' scare up a grin. Your face's enough to fog a film.

"There now!" He turned and patted the box under his hand with a gesture of sincere affection. "I reckon you'll make good film now, old girl. Take a brace, Arthur," he resumed. "I got to see Mr. Twiggs an' tell him I'm all ready. Ketchem wants this in a hurry. I betcha we make it right away."

Five minutes later he reappeared.

"Them boxes is all threaded, Mr. Twiggs," he announced. "I seen Art, an' he says you got it all doped out."

"I've got the new stuff," said Bobby, "and now I'm trying to fit something to it."

"Say, Mr. Twiggs, you ain't in love, are you?" questioned Flynn.

"No!" snapped his temporary boss. "I'm too busy. What put that fool notion into your bean?"

"Art thinks you're stuck on that Marjorie skirt," explained Flynn. "He's got an awful grouch. If you'd just put him wise—— I'm afraid he's goin' to spoil my pitchers if he goes on like he is, an' I got a record to maintain. Barrin' pinholes an' bum actin', I don't pull many 'remakes,' Mr. Twiggs. So if you'll tell Art you ain't tryin' to grab thet doll——"

"Holy smoke, wait!" howled Bobby, banging a fist on his desk. "That's it! By the Great Horn Spoon, I got it! I don't need to *make* a scenario for this; it's made already. We'll pull it at the old race track over by the Ostrich Farm; and I'll advertise for a hundred extras in tonight's papers, and tomorrow morning we'll make Ketchem a picture that'll make him sit up. Bully! Limpy, you're a wonder. You've helped me out of this hole, all right."

"I'm glad if I have, Mr. Twiggs," said Limpy. "An' if you'll just tell Art. I hope the picture will be a good one——"

"It will," declared Bobby, beaming. "And don't you mind Art. He'll do what I tell him, all right. I'm goin' to call this thing—I'm going to call it—to call it—'Bulldogging a Bride.' Wow! I guess that's a perfectly wretched title, eh, Limpy? Poor? Oh, poverty-stricken. Say—get out while I write it up."

Limpy rose slowly from the seat he had taken and eyed Bobby in silent wonder.

" 'Bulldoggin' a Bride,' " he repeated softly. "Well, for the love of Mike!"

He put on his cap and limped out.

II

THE next morning found the Kineto-color troupe assembled at the race track, which Bobby had chosen as the location for the action of the new picture.

Twiggs gathered them about him and began a rapid-fire explanation and direction.

"Now listen," he began. "This story is about a rich rancher's daughter an' a puncher. Th' puncher—that's you, Art—is in love with th' girl, of course. Th' girl—that's Marjorie—can't see the thing that way. We'll work up to the big scene after we do this, and maybe use some cut-ins we've done already.

"Anyway, this action takes place at a Wild West show where Art is a champion buster an' roper. It's a contest of bulldogging steers. You extras git over in th' grandstand, an' when th' steer comes down you wave your hats an' holler an' register excitement. Marjorie sits in the front row.

"Then when Art gets th' steer down he gets hurt an' lets it go an' lies still. Marjorie, you jump over th' rail an' run straight down into the eye of th' machine. Kneel down an' get Art's head in your arms; then look up an' register fear and emotion. Better kiss Art a time or two, an' then holler for help.

"Then you other boys establish yourselves and carry Art off. Now if you got it we'll begin. Limpy, you put your box about here, and shoot low. I don't want more'n two rows of seats in this, with Marjorie in th' center, an' a good, clear action on Art an' her at th' last.

"Now I guess we're ready. Marjorie, take these extras over to the stand with you; and Art, go get your horse. You ride by, bowin' first to establish yourself. Then they turn th' steer loose. Now, then!

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Get to your places. That's right, Margy. Sit still an' look pleasant. Come on, Art. All right, Limpy. Action, now!"

Limpy's hand began to revolve, propelling the crank which spun the sensitive film from its spool to the camera's eye, and thence to the take-up box. Limpy's eyes focused straight before him, and his face grew set with purpose. He was engaged in the work he loved.

Art mounted his horse and rode along the grandstand, bowing to the plaudits of the extras, whirled the animal on its hind feet, and rode back to the beginning.

The steer came down in a rush, urged on by several other riders beyond the radius of the action. It swept into the picture at a rangy run. Art's mount leaped in pursuit, dashed upon the fleeing creature, and checked at a pressure from its rider's knees.

Art vaulted from the saddle and struck the ground running. He raced to the steer's flank, to its quarter; his arms went out and he seized it by the horns. With a wrench and a twist, as he braced himself in full stride, he forced the animal's head down and around, until the brute, losing its balance, wavered and went to its knees and its side-dragging him with it in a choking cloud of dust.

Marjorie vaulted the grandstand rail and ran forward, her face a picture of dismay. A smile of satisfaction flitted across the face of Limpy Flynn as he turned the crank with a steady hand. Limpy felt that the film would be a good one, and he chuckled.

"That son of a gun Twiggs took th' kid's own story for his picture," said Limpy to himself. "Thet makes Art's lookin' like a sour pickle fit in swell. I betcha Ketchem likes this fine."

The running girl reached the side of the prostrate McLeod, who had released the steer and now lay outstretched in the center of the camera's focus. She went to her knees and raised his head in her arms. She raised her head, and one could have sworn that frenzied terror leaped from her eyes. Her face dropped to Art's; she kissed him.

Then she opened her lips and screamed:

"Come here—quick! He's hurt! He's hurt, I tell you! Oh, won't somebody hurry?"

"Fine!" cried Bobby Twiggs. "Come on, you other fellows, and carry him off!"

"Good work," commended Limpy Flynn, as he gathered it all into the take-up, and grinned in satisfaction.

An eruption of bespurred and bechapped figures occurred on the race track. They ran to the side of Art and the girl, and stooped to pick up the man.

"Take him easy. He really is hurt. He's bleeding," directed Miss Camp out of very white lips. She arose to her feet, staggered slightly, and capped the climax of the action by falling in a genuine faint.

"'Snough," muttered Limpy, and stopped his machine right there.

THE doctor finished dressing a badly gored side, strapped up a couple of broken ribs as best he could, with due respect to dressing the open wound, and explained to a white-faced girl that with proper care and attention Mr. McLeod would in all probability recover; although he was rather weak from loss of blood, and must wait until he showed whether or not infection would attack his wounds. Then he promised to look in again later, and departed. Miss Camp took off her hat and remained.

What transpired after that was strictly between the man on the bed and the girl who sat perched on its edge; from which she rose in some confusion when a rap fell on the door. When the door opened to admit Limpy Flynn, she was sitting in a chair from which she had called—

"Come in."

"Hello, Art," began Limpy, and paused at sight of Miss Camp. "Hello, Miss Margy," he continued. Then he turned to the victim of the morning's action and went on:

"Bo, I just sloped in to give you my congratulations. I'm sure sorry you got hurt, but I guess it was worth all it cost."

McLeod grinned weakly and winced with pain.

"She sure is, old timer," he agreed.

"She's th' finest ever," continued Flynn. "I never seen one finer in all my life, an' that's sayin' a lot. For all around perfection she's just about the best ever."

"But," queried McLeod, "how'd you know about it, Limpy? I thought——"

"Know about it?" said Flynn. "Say—did you hurt yer coco? I was there. I was turnin' th' crank. I tested her myself. She runs swell. There ain't a pinhole or a rainstorm or a fog. She's fine!"

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McLeod frowned. "What are you chewin' on anyway, Limpy?" he asked.

"Why, th' film! We run her off a half hour ago, an' she's great. Now thet you've got hurt, Mr. Twiggs is goin' to use thet last ranch dramer we made—th' one where Miss Margy don't take to your love-makin' right away—an' then use this film for a cut-in; an' tomorrow mornin' I'm goin' to make a pitcher of you in bed, with Miss Margy playin' nurse for a 'close.' How's that?" Flynn paused.

Art turned his head slightly and looked at Miss Camp. "Shall we tell him?" he asked.

Marjorie blushed, but nodded.

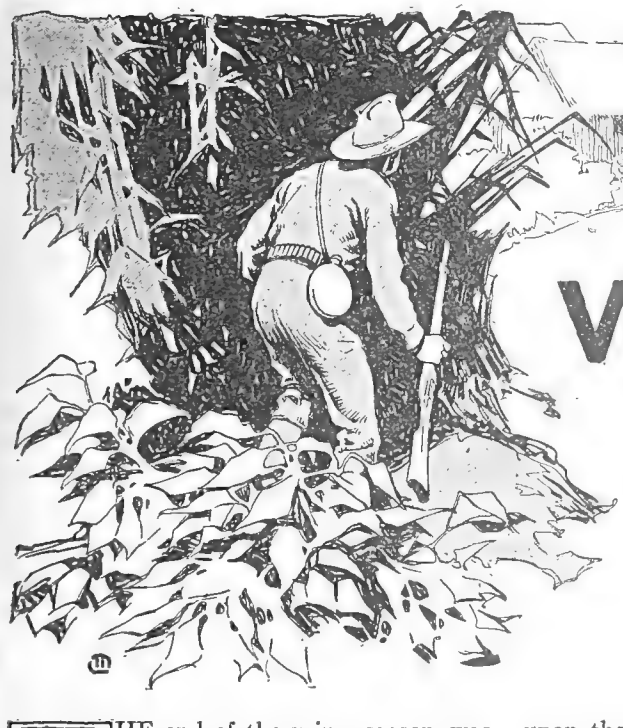
"I suppose we may as well," she replied.

McLeod cleared his throat.

"I thought you was talkin' about us—me an' Margy, old timer," he told Flynn. "You see, Marjorie's said th' right word at last, Limpy, an' I'm goin' to get well in spite of my doctor. We're goin' to be married as soon as Margy goes out and gets a license."

"Well, for the love of Mike!" gasped Flynn. "I reckon it was a woodtick after all, wasn't it, Art? Well, seein' how it's turned out, I guess I kin stretch my remarks to cover. You look sorter satisfied, you two, an' I'm sure glad.

"But what I really was congratulatin' you on, Art, was on makin' the best 'fall' I ever got a chance to shoot. An' about this weddin' stuff: wait. Don't you do nothin' till I go tell Mr. Twiggs an' git my boxes. We've gotta have a pitcher of that."



The Heart of the Volunteer

by R. B. MacRorie

THE end of the rainy season was at hand. For months the steady downpour had fallen upon all the land and made rushing torrents of small mountain streams, and turned dusty roadways into lanes that ran ankle-deep in mud.

The leaden, watery sky began to clear. Occasional bright sunbeams burst through upon the sodden earth and intensified the humidity of the atmosphere. The overcast sky gradually split up into little rain-clouds as the days passed by. The sun shone bright between the showers, high parts of the old Spanish military roads hardened slowly, and the large pools of water in the hollows gradually became smaller and shallower.

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Here and there throughout the rice terraces little patches of black soil appeared as the waters receded. The underbrush in the swamp lands began to straighten under the rays of the sun. The strong, rain-laden winds died away and the long nipa grass, knife-edged, raised its wavy head upon the foot-hills about the village of Calisaria, in southern Luzon.

The old stone church in the plaza was occupied by Company A of the —th Infantry Volunteers. Veterans were they—lean, bronzed, hardened, acclimated to the country, inured to hardship and privation, heroes of a score of sharp engagements, soldier-wise to the vagaries of the seasons and the little brown men.

For many long, weary months they had pursued and harassed the guerilla-like enemy, captured, destroyed and driven them from the Province. But one insurgent of consequence, Colonel Quentin, remained at liberty.

Chief of a small band of cutthroats, he preyed upon the friendly natives and insurgents alike, forcing them to pay tribute in money and supplies. Bloodthirsty and cruel, he terrorized the natives into silence and abject fear, wantonly butchering those who failed to meet his demands or hinted at reprisal.

A reward was offered for his capture or his dead body, but when his name was mentioned the natives shivered with apprehension, crossed themselves and called upon their patron saints for protection. Through the provinces the volunteers hiked swiftly upon his trail at each vague rumor of his location, every officer and man keenly alive to the reward of promotion sure to follow his capture.

The time of the Volunteers' enlistment was nearly over. In a few short months their tour of service would be complete, and homeward bound they would sail away with glad hearts toward the ever loving folks that awaited their home-coming in God's country. Out upon the broad expanses of the Pacific the big Army transports were steaming, bringing the Regular troops to take their places throughout the Islands.

One bright morning, upon the broad mahogany window ledge of the church at Calisaria, Sergeant Lane sat and gazed out upon the scene below. A lean brown sentry paced back and forth before the church door. A little squad of Filipinos moved silently about, cleaning up the adjacent ground, as quietly followed by their gaunt guards. As Lane gazed at them he seemed to catch an oddly penetrating, yet furtive, glance from one of the squad of prisoners. Curiously he stared back at the ugly scarred face of the native, who turned away carelessly and assumed an attitude which did not seem to invite further notice.

A short half hour before, with blare of bugle, shout of hoarse command, and rattle of accouterment, Troop B of the Regular cavalry arrived upon the scene, and men and horses dotted the plaza in brilliant and orderly array.

The sun sparkled and shone upon their burnished metal and the bright new uniforms that enclosed the fat, well fed forms of the cavalrymen, and glistened upon the sleek steeds, fresh and full of spirit, just arrived from the old U. S.

The handful of the guard, as they turned out and presented arms to the arriving troop, seemed puny and lifeless; their much washed, ragged, faded uniforms looked dingy, their old blue shirts had a greenish hue, and their faces were tinged with fever-yellow, beside the brightness and healthfulness of the new arrivals.

Stiffly at present arms they stood, faces expressionless, eyes straight to the front, as they saluted. Then quietly at the word of dismissal they fell out, turned their backs upon the troop and sought the shade and seclusion of the guard house.

It was the first time cavalry had been in Calisaria. Little knots of natives gathered about at a distance and cast curious glances at the big horses and red-faced men. The garrison remained aloof, for in the minds of the men of Company A there still lingered poignant memories of their first meeting with the troop.

But ten days before, with spirits running high with prospects of glad news from home, their hearts full of friendship and comradeship, A Company hiked to the coast and gladly and joyously welcomed the troop as it disembarked, and escorted it to San Pedro in the next province, where the cavalry took post.

Hungry for news, the company virtually flung itself at them with open arms. Freeheartedly they unbosomed their souls of pent-up longings for home and the home folks, and when all the home news had been

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obtained and absorbed, in the fulness of their hearts they endeavored to reciprocate by informing the troop of the manifold wiles of the natives, and tried to post them as to the pitfalls and lures devised by the enemy, and the best means to handle and circumvent them.

Instantly, with sneer and innuendo, the troop turned upon them. The nerve of a lot of measly Volunteers to attempt to teach Regulars! A lot of homesick milksops, they declared, trying to dictate tactics to Regular cavalry that had fought in Cuba!

Insult brought curt rejoinder, and only the stern command and control of the veteran non-coms of Company A prevented open trouble. With sore hearts and stiff backbones the men of A hiked back to their own command. Long months of toilsome service and strict attention to order and duty instilled obedience into them, and it required but a quiet word to keep them all in quarters and out of sight of the troop upon the plaza.

ONCE again, as Lane sat idly upon the window sill, he caught an insistent, meaning glance from the ugly prisoner in the squad below. He arose to investigate, but the appearance of the Captain's orderly halted him.

" 'Lo, top," said Orderly Brown, as Lane grinned a friendly welcome.

"That cavalry is trying to get wise to the roads around here. The lieutenant in command asked the Major for a guide, as he wants to go up to the top of the mountain and get a view of the surrounding country.

"Major told him he was sorry he couldn't send an officer with him, as he was all alone in post, but would give him an escort of ten men. The shavetail said he only wanted a guide, but the Major said as he was in our Province we had to provide an escort.

"Orders are, a sergeant and ten men, to escort Troop B through the village of Boc-Boc to top of mountain and return, they to go at once."

"Sure he said *escort?*" queried Lane.

"Yes."

"Sergeant Hall!" called Lane, as he stepped into the squad room. Quickly he gave Hall the order, and the detachment formed promptly and followed the orderly down the stairs.

As Lane watched their progress across the parade ground he caught another veiled upward glance from the scar-faced prisoner, and, curiosity aroused, he sauntered below and had the man sent alone into the courtyard in the rear of the church.

"What do you want?" he asked in the native lingo.

"*¿Vamos BocBoc?*" queried Scarface, waving his arm in the direction of the waiting troops.

"*Sí.*"

"*¡Mal hombre—BocBoc!*" said the native quickly, with an expressive look; then turned away.

For a moment Lane stared after him, then ran swiftly to the barrack door, and with fast beating heart walked in a casual manner to where the escort stood waiting upon the road.

"Here, give me your gun and belt, Hall! Quick! Go back and do the first sergeant act, and keep quiet until I get out of town!" he ordered tensely.

As Hall moved away the cavalry bugle shrilled out quick commands, the troop mounted, formed column of twos, and quickly came upon the road and faced the little escort.

"The lightest man in that squad will mount," ordered the lieutenant, as he indicated a riderless horse. Lane glanced at his smallest man, caught his eye, and nodded. The man mounted.

"Wait for you at the first trail!" snapped the officer, as the bugle sounded and the troop broke into a trot. Lane glared after them as the squad stood still and watched them clatter by.

"Wait!" said one of the men. "We can walk those horses to death!"

"You wait!" growled Lane, as he led the way down the road. With scowling face he headed for the first pool of water he saw and splashed into it. "Get your feet good and wet, and keep them wet. We're going to do some hiking today," he said.

Straight through the pool each man splattered, and as they stepped upon hard earth again their feet squashed in their shoes, and water squirted out between the laces. At a slow pace the detachment followed the cavalry until the troop passed from view around a bend in the road. Then Lane stopped and gathered the men around him.

"What's the first duty of a soldier?" he asked, as he glared at them.

"Obey orders," said Private "Windy" Miller.

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"Correct! See that you do it! My orders! You understand?"

They stared at him curiously.

"My orders only!" snapped Lane again. "Get it?"

For a moment more they gazed blankly, then a smile went around the cricle.

"I guess there'll be some fun today," laughed Miller, as with twinkling eyes they followed him down the road.

A short mile from town the trail that led to BocBoc branched from the military road, and there, dismounted, the cavalry awaited their approach. Without waiting for commands the little escort marched by the troop and waded through the mudhole at the opening of the trail. Bending their heads and bodies forward, they parted the branches of the thick underbrush and quickly disappeared from view.

Again the bugle shrilled as the troop mounted and followed in single file. The big horses sank to their knees in the deep mud as they floundered and splashed through the swamp, and the troopers bent forward upon the necks of their mounts. As the low branches of the trees swept about them and stung face and hand, they cursed softly to themselves and their mounts.

Choosing their steps carefully, jumping from log to log, slipping from treacherous slimy roots into pools of mud and water, the escort slowly made their way before them, stopping as they gained distance to allow the troop to catch up, then moving quickly onward.

Dense and dark was the swamp, its thick foliage barring out the rays of the sun. The air was close and suffocating, and the deep silence was broken only by the splashing and floundering of man and beast. With lather dripping from their quivering muzzles and sweating flank and saddle girth the big black horses, groaning beneath the weight of rider and equipment, struggled through the black ooze and muck and stood quivering at each halt for rest.

An hour passed by before they neared the first clearing on the trail to BocBoc. The foliage grew less dense and the sun shone through in spots as they neared the opening. The escort moved quickly onward and disappeared from view. In the center of the clearing, surrounded by rice paddies, stood a large house. As Lane came into the open and moved slowly forward, two natives sprang from the shadow of the building and, running madly, dashed toward the shelter of the underbrush.

"There they go!" yelled a soldier, as he swung his rifle to his shoulder.

R-R-R-RP-P-P! Ping-ping! sounded the firing of the squad as they blazed away rapidly at the fast running figures that stumbled and fell into the darkness at the edge of the brush. The sound of the firing reverberated and echoed over the watery rice fields, until it seemed as if a great battle were going on. Then it suddenly ceased as the natives disappeared from view.

From the swamp came the clear blast of the bugle as the cavalry hurried forward, pushing their weary steeds through the mud, dashing for the open. When they reached the clearing everything was quiet and serene. Lounging idly in the shadow of the hut stood the detachment, waiting for two of their number who had followed the flying natives to the point of their disappearance, and who were returning across the field.

Quickly the lieutenant rode up and demanded an explanation of what had occurred.

"Two natives ran from this house," said Lane calmly, "and we fired at them."

"Who gave you men orders to fire?" demanded the officer hotly.

"No one, sir. It is customary to shoot at all who run, as only the guilty try to escape."

"A soldier has no right to fire unless ordered by his commanding officer!" cried the young lieutenant. "I shall hold you responsible for any deviation from Regulations while under my command!"

Lane shrugged his shoulders and moved away from the hut, about which the cavalry had clustered as they dismounted and lay at rest. His men followed him and they sat upon a ridge between the rice flats.

Quietly they conversed together. The two men who had followed the natives exhibited a bloodstained bolo each, that they had hidden beneath their shirts. The small soldier who had ridden with the cavalry grinned as Lane whispered a few directions and commands, and with backs turned to the troop they lay and rested.

When the bugle blew again and the horsemen mounted, Lane once more led the way into the brush. Swiftly he set the pace until the mud-stained hikers secured a long

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lead upon the troop; then he halted suddenly.

"Follow, and make no noise," he whispered and struck out at right angles to the trail. Silently the little band followed, each man in his leader's footsteps, holding back the boughs and rough branches for the man behind. Behind them they could hear the splashing and heaving of the heavy horses through the underbrush, and the sounds of the marching cavalry gradually died away as they moved onward.

Then Lane gathered the squad about him, and explained that his idea was to circle the troop and the village of BocBoc, approaching from the far side in order to intercept those who endeavored to leave that village when the cavalry approached. It was necessary to travel twice as far as the troop and reach the objective point without being seen.

Through the dark and dismal growth of the fetid swamp the men pressed carefully and silently onward. The soft mud oozed from their shoes when they chanced to step upon solid footing. Perspiration streamed from their florid faces and feverish bodies and mingled with the slimy moisture that saturated them from waist to heels.

Sharp branches and projections from the brush caught and tore their clothes and raised scratchy welts upon their necks and faces and the backs of their hands, which smarted like fire as their salty perspiration and the fever-laden moisture of the swamp attacked and inflamed the hurts. Drippings from the growth overhead soaked their headgear until it became soft and limp, but they pulled their soggy hats down upon their wet hair and pushed quietly forward.

Not a murmur came from their lips as they stumbled and fell into mud holes or bumped into sharp corners of brush that tore their flesh. Why should they complain?

Their minds recalled the rebuff at the hands of Troop B. Milksops! Homesick Volunteers! They would get even, they thought, and teach the Regulars a lesson. They didn't know how it would be done, but then—— Well, there was the old "top" Sergeant ahead. Maybe he knew.

An hour passed by, but the pace did not slacken. Steadily, quietly, swiftly they hurried onward without stopping to rest. At each open spot the leader would stop, look and listen carefully, and wait until the entire squad was at his heels. Then he would suddenly dash across the opening and they would follow as quickly behind him.

Another hour, and they reached the end of the swamp country and came out in a little gully that ran between the foot-hills leading to the mountains, and the squad stopped for an instant to scrape clusters of mud from their shoes and leggings. Keeping in the hollows and watching the hilltops carefully, they advanced until they came out upon the road above BocBoc.

A quarter of a mile away its grass-roofed buildings were clustered among the high palms and green banana trees. Quickly they hid in the ditch beside the road as three men hurried away to take post on the trail at the right of the village, and three to the left.

The sun's rays beat down relentlessly upon the earth. The green branches of the trees drooped and dripped with moisture. All was quiet and calm and still. No sound broke the stillness save the croak of a lizard from his perch on the limb of a tree. Presently there was a slight noise from the nearest hut, and from its far corner a long bamboo pole was thrust out, a square of white cloth dangling at the end of the pole. As they gazed at it a smile spread over their faces.

"Guess we're just in time," whispered a soldier. "There goes the signal! They've spotted the cavalry approaching."

"They haven't spotted us. Lie down and keep still," whispered Lane. They snuggled down, lying prone in the bottom of the ditch.

Hysterical shouts sounded throughout the village. The natives rushed hurriedly about and the patter of their bare feet upon the bamboo floorings echoed through the air. An ever increasing volume of excited native voices drew nearer, mingled with the trot of ponies' feet. Lane gathered one knee beneath his body, and as the cavalcade came nearly abreast he sprang up suddenly and threw his rifle to his shoulder.

"HALT!" he shouted, as he menaced three mounted natives, who pulled up their ponies suddenly with blanched faces, and held up their trembling hands. The soldiers sprang into the road and ran their hands over the light-clad bodies of the natives, searching for weapons,

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then turned their attention to the packs on two led ponies behind.

As their eager fingers delved into the mysteries of the bundles, Lane took a heavy leather wallet from one of the natives and eagerly deciphered the Spanish papers it contained. Glancing over them hastily, he grinned broadly; and placing the documents carefully in their receptacle he hid it in his shirt.

"There's some uniforms in these bundles!" cried a soldier excitedly.

"Good enough! Tie them up carefully again. Keep these fellows together, and kill them if they make a move to escape, or attempt to talk to any one. Don't let anybody touch those packs!"

Lane glared at the natives.

"Do you want to die?" he asked sternly. "If you do, just talk to the first man that asks you!"

Barely had they entered the village and established themselves in the plaza when Troop B clattered into view. Lieutenant Blair looked curiously at the little group. Sitting upon the ground, holding their ponies' reins, sat the natives. Near and facing them, sat three soldiers, with their rifles across their knees. So careless and unconcerned, so quiet and lifeless appeared the group that he did not grasp the fact they were prisoners and guard.

"Blow mess call," he ordered, and the silvery notes of the bugle reverberated throughout the village. As the echoes died away a short blast shrilled from Lane's pea-whistle, and the men from the outskirts appeared and gathered before him.

With furtive glance and low voice he spoke to them. They broke up and sauntered about the village, peering into deserted houses, and here and there disappearing inside, reappearing with hatfuls of eggs, short tubes of bamboo filled with rice, and an occasional gamecock.

Gathering about the little group of prisoners, they deposited the eggs and rice tubes upon the ground, brought pieces of dry bamboo broken from nearby fences and built quick hot fires, in the center of which they placed earthenware jars brought from within the houses. With water secured from long bamboo poles leaning against the huts, they partly filled the clay receptacles.

When the water boiled they stepped aside with the cocks. One man took a bird in his left hand, grasped its neck with his right, and with a sudden jerk decapitated it and held the body away from him as blood spurted from the severed neck. As he held it firmly by the legs another man cut the skin about the leg joints, and with a quick jerk removed feathers and skin at one operation.

Cutting the fowl up in chunks, they placed the meat in the boiling pots, stirred the mixture with a stick, and added a few handfuls of rice and a little salt.

The birds were old and tough gamecocks, the boiled meat stringy and rubbery; so, when the stew was done, they threw the chunks of meat upon the ground and poured the liquid into halves of coconut shell, and sipped the hot savory gruel with pleasure and satisfying enjoyment. When the boiled eggs and stew were finished they lay about upon the ground and idly watched the cavalry at its meal.

In squads of eight the troop cooked. Unused to foraging, unable to enter the houses without first securing orders, afraid to touch anything without permission, bunched together in large squads that wrangled noisily, their awkward methods were highly amusing to the veterans who had eaten before they were fairly started on their meal.

The hot coffee the cavalrymen manufactured burned their lips and scorched their tongues and throats; the water they drank seemed tinged with the odor and taste of dead things; their bacon was either half cooked or cooked too much, and they gave little yelps of pain as the burning bacon grease spattered upon their hands when they rescued the meats from the large pans. With a great clattering and hurrying about they washed their utensils after the meal was finished, while the veterans lay quietly smoking and enjoying the scene.

The quick notes of "Boots and Saddles" rang out upon the quiet air, and Lane formed his little detachment in the road, a soldier beside each mounted prisoner, two men in front and four behind them.

"Who are those men?" demanded Lieutenant Blair as he grasped the fact they were under guard.

"Just suspicious characters we have picked up," was the quiet answer.

"More insubordination!" cried the officer angrily. "I have given no orders to arrest those men, and you will release them instantly."

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"Very sorry, sir," said Lane quietly. "Very sorry, but I can not recognize your authority to order the release of these prisoners."

Blair's face flamed red with anger as he shouted at the natives.

"What are you standing there for? Vamose! Get out!" And he motioned to them to ride away.

The prisoners looked curiously at him, and then at the guards beside them, who stood with their rifles lying loosely in the hollows of their left arms, their right forefingers ready upon the trigger. Then their eyes shifted to Lane, who slowly swung his arm up in a horizontal position and pointed down the road.

Instantly, with long steady strides, the doughboys strode away. The pace was faster than the quick walk of the ponies, and the men behind struck them upon the flanks to force them into a trot. When they slackened, the mounted natives swung their feet into the ponies' ribs and followed closely at the heels of the men in front.

The road was firm and hard, deeply ditched at the sides, as it led upward about the side of the mountain; and the detachment had no trouble in easily distancing the plodding cavalry horses that were weary with the heat and the tiresome efforts of carrying their heavy loads through the mud holes of the swamp.

When the escort obtained a long lead they stopped and rested until the troop approached, then quickly moved onward at their swift, ground-covering pace. When the cavalry halted to rest they rested also, but kept their lead ahead.

The miles swept swiftly by under their rapid feet; the summit of the road was reached, and they descended into the valley again, and in a few short hours drew near to Calisaria. The sun sparkled upon the tin roof of the barracks, the cavalry spurred forward in a weary trot and the little detachment drew aside as they vanished up the road toward the village.

AN HOUR later knots of villagers that gazed with curiosity at the big horses tethered in the plaza, stared with wide-open eyes at the prisoners as the escort marched steadily toward their quarters.

A shout of surprise ran through the barracks at their approach. The windows were lined with welcoming men as they walked straight through the open door and disappeared from view, but Lane turned and mounted the broad stairs that led to the headquarters room at the officers' mess.

Beside a flat-topped table stood the Major, at his elbow Lieutenant Blair; while the post telegrapher in the next room sat and idly fingered his key. With a quizzical glance at Lane the Major read extracts from a paper in his hand:

"Charges and specifications against First Sergeant Jonathan Lane, of Company A, —th Regiment, United States Volunteer Infantry," he read slowly. "The charges are 'disobedience of orders of superior officer,' 'refusal to obey orders of superior officer,' and 'conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline.' "

"You have some explanation, perhaps?" he asked sternly.

Lane's eyes rested upon the lieutenant's face as he answered:

"If it please the Major, sir," he said in a nervous voice, "it would appear from the charges that Lieutenant Blair declines to be held responsible for the actions of my detachment?"

"Evidently," said Major Hayes, as he glanced at Blair.

"That being the case," said Lane, "I would like permission to report my detachment." And he glanced meaningly at the Major.

Major Hayes stared at him for a moment; then, as Blair stood mute, a slight twinkle came into his eyes, and he said pleasantly, "I suppose you have no objection, Mr. Blair?

"The lieutenant seems to have no objection," he said, as Blair shook his head. A quick smile broke over Lane's face and he reported quickly:

"With ten men of Company A, pursuant to the commanding officer's orders, I left Calisaria at nine o'clock this morning. At a clearing between here and BocBoc I fired upon two armed enemy who attempted to escape—and killed them both!"

A gasp broke from the lips of Lieutenant Blair. His face flushed, his lips worked for a moment, then he cried:

"Major Hayes——"

"One moment, Mr. Blair," said the Major quickly. "Your permission to the sergeant to report is evidence that his detachment was not under your command, and he will complete his report!"

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"I circled BocBoc," continued Lane, "and lay in ambush on the far side until Troop B approached the village. And there, sir," he cried in a happy, excited voice, "I captured Colonel Quentin and two aides—— and these papers."

And he reached into his shirt and, stepping quickly forward, handed the astonished officer the wallet of documents.

The Major sank slowly into a chair and stared dazedly at the packet in his hand; then quickly tore it open and examined the contents.

"Operator!" he cried sharply. "Send this message at once!" And he wrote rapidly. The telegraph key clicked noisily as he bent over the documents and scrutinized them closely.

"Sure you got the right man, sergeant?"

"Positive, sir," answered Lane, as he stepped to the open window and waved his hand in a small circle above his head. There was the sound of quick command from below, the tread of many feet upon the stairway; and, clad in full uniform, came marching the three captives, with grinning guards at their heels.

"The commanding officer," indicated Lane as they stepped into the room.

"We may speak now, sergeant the first?" smilingly asked the one in the gaudiest uniform.

"Sure," said Lane with a bright smile.

The little man stepped before the Major and brought his heels together and stood erect, his aides at attention behind him. Smartly he brought his hand up in salute, and they followed suit. Erect and grim Major Hayes returned the salute, and Colonel Quentin broke into voluble chatter.

"It gives me pleasure surrender to commanding officer —th hikers. I fought them many good fights. Very, very interesting. I speak the Englis' which I taught at University Manila.

"There I speak many languages—Latin, Greek, French, Philosophia and Englis'. Your General Manila not love me, and order hikers kill me; but the *sargento primero*," he said, as he beamed upon Lane, "he good man. No shoot!"

Then his glance fell upon Lieutenant Blair and he continued:

"Those men on the big horses—those—what you call them?—rookies. Maybe they like kill me!"

Blair's face went white with anger as he glared at the little native. He turned his back upon the group, mind whirling with anger and disgust, as he realized the opportunity he had lost. The name of Colonel Quentin had been dinned into his ears ever since he reached the Islands. Sure promotion and honor lay within the grasp of the officer who captured him, but the chance had slipped through his fingers.

Duped by a measly Volunteer, tricked by an enlisted man! Fool, fool that he had been, he thought, as with dejected face and set lips he slowly walked to the table and picked up the charges he had written. Beside them lay a copy of the message sent by Major Hayes. His eyes glanced at it and the words seemed to be burned into his brain, as he read:

> Detachment of Company A under my command this day captured Colonel Quentin and two aides.
> HAYES, *Major.*

No mention there of Troop B. No mention of Lieutenant Blair. No credit to him. None deserved, for he had declined to be responsible for the acts of men under his command! Slowly he tore the charges into little bits and cast the remnants upon the floor.

Sorrowfully he stood at the window and saw the gaily appareled prisoners and their guards cross the parade ground a short time later. The barrack windows were lined with men who waved their hats in the air and yelled their approval of the little squad, and shouted facetiously to the prisoners. As Blair stood moodily watching the scene, a quiet step sounded beside him, and Major Hayes stood at his elbow, friendliness and sympathy apparent in his clear features and soft voice as he spoke.

"It has been many years since I left the Point, Mr. Blair," he said in a reminiscent tone. "I was young and inexperienced, and had a great regard for my importance and the dignity of my rank. I soon found that the officers are but a part of the great system of our Army. The men have a part, too—a large part—in the events that transpire in the Army's life.

"Heretofore I have always been attached to the Cavalry. It is my ideal branch of the service, and I admire it above all others. These islands are hard on cavalry, Mr. Blair. The topography is so broken and rough. That is why these many regiments of Infantry Volunteers were formed to do

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the work here, and accounts for my temporary detail as Major of Volunteers.

"For thirty years I have commanded Regulars; for two, Volunteers. The Regulars are my branch, but the Volunteers, well—— The Volunteers are different in some ways. These regiments have done wonderful work in the islands, Mr. Blair. Work that I doubt any other body could equal, and none surpass.

"I have watched and studied the men and learned their ideas, their hopes, their ambitions. And I find that the Volunteer is a product of the war, and the war alone. Men sometimes enlist in the Regulars and take the service as a method of livelihood, a home for life, an easy job, they think. The Volunteer enlists to fight for the flag.

"It's patriotism that draws him in. He cares naught for the life of a soldier in times of peace. He wants to fight for the glory of the flag and his country. When the fighting is over he pines for home, and Army life becomes distasteful and crude.

"That's why we get a different class of men in the Volunteers, Mr. Blair. Men of profession, men of trades, men with initiative and the brains to carry out their ideas. They learn to drill quickly and easily. Rules and regulations become open books to them, and they develop leaders that are as efficient as their officers and as loyal as the men they command.

"Drill, Mr. Blair, was invented to instil discipline and instant obedience to orders when in action, and these Volunteers are quick to learn that discipline. There can not be a greater fighting body in the world than troops made up of such units.

"Loyal to their officers, ever ready to back up their company and regiment with word and deed, fearing nothing, daring anything, they labor for the credit of their company, the honor of their regiment, and the glory of the flag."

As Blair stood and listened, his mind grew quick with understanding as he thought of the quiet efficiency of the little squad and the smooth celerity with which they had accomplished their work that day. How easy it had been for them to circumvent his wishes and steal honor and promotion from under his very nose! His youthful spirits rose as he thought of his haughty actions and the quick fall of his pride, and he smiled to himself as the Major's voice droned on.

"These men of A are good men, Mr. Blair. They're the kind of men I would like always to command. Perhaps they are quick to take offense, but just as ready to forgive when they see you mean well toward them. I think that covers the case, Mr. Blair," said the Major slowly.

"I think, sir," said Blair, with a wry smile, "I think they're the kind of men I would like to command, too," and he grasped the Major's outstretched hand in a hearty grip.

THE sun rose bright and clear the next morning. First call and reveille followed in quick succession, and the Post broke into active life. The black horses were groomed until their bodies shone, and the sun glistened brightly upon the metal of the arms and accouterments of the yellow-striped troop. Erect and jaunty, the men sat upon their horses and waited for their young officer as he came riding gaily from the officers' mess. The first sergeant of the troop brought up his hand in salute, and wheeled to his place behind the right of the line.

"Twos right, column left!" rang out the clear command.

"Twos left!" and the troop turned and trotted straight toward the barracks. The windows and doors were lined with the men of the Volunteers. Straight forward came the troop, until they reached a halt within twenty paces of the building.

"Halt! Draw saber!"

The men in the windows gasped with open mouth.

"Present, sabers!"

"My ——, they're saluting us!" cried a shrill voice, and the barracks rang with a cheer that shook the building to its foundations.

"Carry, sabers! Twos right, column right! March!" came the command as the echoes lingered.

"You're all right, B Troop!"

"Good boy, lieutenant!"

"Come again!"

The men shouted and waved their hats and arms at the departing troop, and the cavalrymen turned in their saddles and waved back at them as they rode away.

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Dillingham's Bill

by Chester T. Crowell

DILLINGHAM had a bill. It was not one of those things with the rubber-stamp hand pointing to the amount and proclaiming "overdue." Far from such. It was a lengthy affair, all typewritten, price three dollars cash.

It began rather playfully at Genesis, thus: "An Act, being an Act entitled an Act to amend an Act." Of course, the idea was that it would be "an Act" just as soon as the Legislature passed it, which Dillingham was convinced the Legislature would do at its earliest convenience.

In fact, it was to present this bill and obtain its passage that Dillingham had got himself elected to the Legislature.

Dillingham was from Alameda County, which is about eight hundred miles from the eastern border of Texas, and, therefore, fairly well over into West Texas. He had lived in Alameda County ten long years, which had seemed tremendously eventful to him until one morning he took stock of them and realized that they consisted of the routine of a year's work on the ranch done ten times, with a rattlesnake bite furnishing the only thing in the way of romance and adventure.

Dillingham recalled with pain that he had always intended to be President. Here he had gone and wasted ten good years making twenty thousand dollars, and hadn't started on his life work. He resolved right then and there to run for constable, or something.

He looked about for a platform and discovered the need of a bridge across the river. It would cost five hundred thousand dollars to build the right sort of a bridge. The counties most directly interested could raise two hundred thousand dollars under the law limiting bonded debt.

Obviously the thing to do was to go to the Legislature from Alameda County, and come back with a bridge. He announced his candidacy in opposition to a human clothespin who confessed the profession of the law, and the thriving cow town of Brewster as his place of abode.

Dillingham scorned to fear his rival, even though he was a lawyer. Dillingham was one of the thirty or forty million men in the U. S. A. who are certain of their ability to make a speech. A speech had been sizzling around in Dillingham's breast since early youth and he felt the need of getting it out of his system.

In the shade of a pecan tree, after an old-time Texas barbecue, he delivered it. The speech began with the promise of the bridge and ended with the bridge a glorious reality,

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Mexico conquered and the Lone Star flag of Texas half way to the straits of Magellan.

The human clothespin followed the conventional line of praising the brave men and beautiful women of Alameda County, recounting the deeds of Hood's Texans in the Civil War, and closing with a poem entitled "Mother."

Now this sort of stuff had been successful in Alameda County ever since 1845, when Texas annexed the United States and acquired the Legislature habit along with candidates for appointment to post-offices, the divorce evil, and vaudeville.

But the people were beginning to grow weary. They actually called the oratory hog wash and sheep dip. Some of the old timers blamed this change of public opinion on to the newly acquired telegraph lines.

Anyway, Alameda had ceased to search for an honest legislator. They accepted the verdict of Diogenes on that historic quest, and contented themselves with picking the man who would steal the least and overlook the most bets.

It was generally agreed that a farmer didn't have the opportunities of a lawyer, and any one who made such a poor speech as Dillingham would not be likely to return and open a bank, so they elected him.

Dillingham and the County Judge perspiringly drew up the bridge bill, with the aid of three stub pens and six blotters, after which the new legislator set out for Austin with a notebook to keep track of his mileage from the signs on the depots along the way.

On his arrival in the capital city, Dillingham searched for a stenographer to make a copy of his bill. The stenographer materialized in the form of a young man in pale gray trousers with cuffs, green socks, a Panama hat, a blasé air, and a cigarette. Dillingham considered this specimen doubtfully, but finally amputated the bridge bill from between a plug of tobacco and a red handkerchief, entrusting it to the care of the young man, to whom he referred as "Lizzie." He warned Lizzie to be careful with the original copy or suffer the penalty of being stepped on.

When Lizzie presented the neatly typed pages, Dillingham discovered that some changes had been made, but before blood was spilled the author of the bridge bill was convinced that his spelling went out of date about the time Chaucer's English became a foreign language in London.

WITH the neatly typewritten copy of the bill in his hand the gentleman from Alameda adjourned to the great granite pile where the valiant sons of Texas gather from the farms and ranches and cities to make laws, a considerable portion of which the Supreme Court on the floor above deodorizes at its earliest convenience.

Dillingham occupied one of the front seats when the venerable Secretary of State called the Legislature to order. He heard the prayer of the chaplain, which was aimed south by northeast at every public question then pending. When the nominating speeches were made preparatory to the election of a Speaker, tears of gratitude coursed down Dillingham's cheeks, for he knew it was to be a matter of but a small time until such speeches would be in his behalf.

Dillingham looked about him and picked from the sea of faces the more intelligent countenances, counting up those who would be for the bridge bill when that momentous vote upon which hinged the future greatness of the western counties beyond the river should be taken.

Representative Hunck was elected Speaker. Dillingham had voted for him, so he felt more than ever convinced that the bridge bill was on the highroad to early victory. Indeed there seemed little to do now but make the speech that his reception in Brewster would demand on his return home. He meant to return home just as soon as the bridge bill was passed.

When the House convened on the following morning, Dillingham marched forward to the desk of the chief clerk and deposited the bridge bill. The clerk picked it up, apparently with small realization of its great import, and wrote over the top of the outside cover "Number 411."

"What's that for?" Dillingham asked.

"This is the four hundred and eleventh bill introduced at this session," responded the clerk wearily.

"This session began yesterday," Dillingham corrected.

"I know it," calmly replied the clerk.

Dillingham stood there looking the numerous questions that were in his mind.

"Didn't you bring this bill with you, already written out?" asked the clerk.

"Sure," replied Dillingham, "but if every

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man in the House had done the same thing there'd only be a hundred and thirty of 'em."

"Well, the answer is that some of 'em brought fifty and ain't through yet," growled the clerk.

"Do we vote on 'em in the order they came in?" asked Dillingham, in alarm.

"No, they refer 'em to committees."

"What do the committees do with 'em?" asked Dillingham.

"Kill 'em," calmly decreed the clerk.

Dillingham looked appealingly at the clerk and then toward his unsuspecting bridge bill.

"Won't they let a fellow in when they mess with his property?" asked Dillingham anxiously.

"Sure, they send for him," remarked the clerk.

"That's all I want to know," Dillingham announced.

Then he sauntered out of the hall of the House of Representatives back to the hotel bar and claimed his six-shooter, which had been left there for safe keeping. He was of a school which preferred an honest man to an iron safe, and hotel clerks with their "Leave Valuables Here" signs never seemed quite so trustworthy as bartenders to men of Dillingham's ilk.

There was seldom a time in the frontier days of any part of the United States when the principal dispenser of alcoholic chee might not have decamped with a very conr siderable portion of the accumulated and portable wealth of his community and contiguous territory. Indeed, men used to register at the hotel bar by leaving their coats and bags, together with instructions to the porter to obtain a room.

But while all this was being said, Dillingham had buckled his pilot of troubled seas on the inside of his trousers and was half way back to the capitol.

Arriving there, he learned that the future of the West had been referred to the Committee on Roads and Bridges, which Committee had decided to meet on the following morning and take up the Dillingham bridge bill.

With this definite information to console him, the Representative from Alameda took his seat and listened to the impassioned speech of a plain little man with ratlike eyes and a missing third finger that left a space as wide as a country road between the other fingers every time he raised his hand in excited gesture.

Dillingham listened for twenty minutes, then touched a neighbor on the arm and asked, "Say, what's the matter with that *hombre*?"

"He's speaking on his child labor bill," replied the neighbor.

"Huh!" grunted Dillingham. "The skunk! I'm ag'in' that; there's too much child labor now without makin' laws for more."

Having delivered himself of this opinion, Dillingham strode out of the hall.

At five o'clock on the following morning he walked into the hall of the House of Representatives. A sleepy guard awoke when the door slammed behind him, and demanded with great show of authority—

"What's your name?"

"Dillingham," replied the new legislator. "Where is the Roads and Bridges Committee meeting?"

"They don't meet till ten o'clock," replied the doorkeeper, grinning.

"Is the House in session?" asked Dillingham, nodding toward the group of legislators listening to a speaker whose voice had evidently been trained for service as a fog horn, or for calling hogs.

"No," replied the doorkeeper. "This is a caucus; it's been here all night. The House don't meet till ten o'clock. I'll have to ask you to get out."

"And suppose I don't get out," Dillingham calmly suggested, with an unconscious movement toward his right hip pocket.

"Are you a Prohibitionist?" asked the guard, failing to understand the humor of the intruder.

"No," replied Dillingham. "I'm here to get a bridge bill passed for Alameda County."

The guard had a sudden hunch.

"Are you an Anti?" he asked.

"No," said Dillingham, "I'm for the bridge bill."

The guard drew a little nearer.

"Take a tip from me," he whispered. "The Pros have got this Legislature by the tail with a downhill drag. Get into that caucus. Be a Pro, and they'll take care of your bridge bill when the time comes. That's what I'm here for."

"I can't hear you," said the legislator, grinning.

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HE STROLLED back to the hotel, and standing in the lobby waiting for the breakfast hour saw man after man go into a door labeled "Sample Room." Presently he opened the door.

"Name, please?" challenged the guard.

"Dillingham," growled the Representative from Alameda.

"Did you sign the call for the Anti caucus?" asked the guard.

"No."

"Are you willing to be bound by its action?" suggested the guard, extending a sheet of paper containing a long list of names.

"What's it goin' to do?" asked Dillingham.

"Choose a floor leader," replied the guard. "Are you an Anti?"

"I'm for the Alameda County bridge bill, and that's all I'm for," declared the legislator.

"Then listen," hissed the guard. "Kick in with these fellows. They've got this legislature hog-tied, and they'll take care of the local bills of every man in the caucus. That's why I'm here; come in."

"No, thanks," replied Dillingham.

When the legislator went to breakfast the emptiness of his stomach was counterbalanced by the fulness of his mind to such an extent that he ate very little. Presently a great crowd of men came through the double doors into the dining-room, and Dillingham heard them say that Smith, of Angelina County, had been selected leader of the Anti-Prohibitionists.

The tone of voice in which this information was conveyed plainly meant that the King of England is as a wooden Indian compared to a floor leader of the Antis. Yet when Dillingham looked upon this man, yearning to be dazzled, he beheld a plain little person in a dingy suit, peering out furtively from behind spectacles, and plainly in need of sleep.

Dillingham was beginning to wonder if this Legislature business might not be close kin in its solemnity to a back yard game of Ku-Klux-Klan in which he had played as a boy.

Having majestically waved away his finger bowl and called for a toothpick, Dillingham made bold to approach the table at which this Anti floor leader was sitting.

"Mr. Smith," he said, "are you familiar with the facts regarding the necessity for a bridge over the river out in my County which the State will have to build because the counties haven't got enough money?"

"What is your County?" demanded Smith sharply, his previously carefully maintained smile vanishing with such suddenness that Dillingham almost felt his vertebræ crash one against another.

"Alameda," replied the legislator.

"You were not in our caucus this morning, I believe," said Smith.

"No," admitted Dillingham.

"I am not familiar with your bridge proposition," Smith then replied.

"Well, what I want to know," continued Dillingham with utter frankness, "is when will all this monkey-doodle business get over with so I can get to explain my bill and have a vote on it?"

"That all depends," advised Smith wisely. "Whom did you support for Speaker of the House?"

"I voted for Hunck," was the reply.

"You *voted* for Hunck?" Smith repeated with sarcasm. "So did every one else here, now that he is elected. Were you in the caucus that asked him to run?"

"No," Dillingam admitted.

"Well, then, it will be difficult for you to get the floor early in the session on a purely local measure."

"But this is a matter of State-wide importance," declared the gentleman from Alameda.

"There is nothing in the Democratic platform about it," declared Smith with finality.

"I suppose not, but——" began Dillingham.

"And I suppose you spend all the money in one place," Smith interrupted. "That would make the building of a stairway to heaven a local measure."

"Well, suppose it is a local measure," argued Dillingham. "Why can't I get a vote on it?"

"Because," Smith promptly replied, "local measures don't come up until after the platform demands have been enacted or defeated, and even then a measure like yours would need strong support to get so large an appropriation for one county. You had better tie up with one side or another of the railroad consolidation issue and see if they can take care of you."

"Thank you," said Dillingham, in a way that meant, "That is just exactly what I will not do."

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Here was a plan for passing the bridge bill that was not in his mind at all. Dillingham had thought this whole matter out; and it was definitely settled, so far as he was concerned, that all the progressive members who love the common people should be on his side, while the hired malefactors of sinister influences should all be on the other side, perspiring great beads of poisonous matter. At least two, he planned, should turn purple and drop in a fit, during which they should foam at the mouth just as the bill was passed.

Then he would ride home, be met at Brewster by the entire population, and make a speech which would result in his nomination for the governorship or presidency. The people would then elect him unanimously and he would live happily ever after.

Grabbing on to the coat tails of some one else's caucus was not his idea of the way to pass the bridge bill. In going out of the dining-room, however, Dillingham had one of those rare thoughts which, grasped firmly by the business end, Shakespeare declared lead on to automobiles and country homes. Dillingham plucked this one at the exact moment of ripeness and moved rapidly toward another door labeled "Sample Room."

IN THERE was a crowd of men about to take a ballot. The plan was to select a railroad consolidation bill out of the five offered and pass it through the Legislature. Opposed to this was another caucus which had already met and selected its war paint and chief word hurlers.

Slowly it began to be clear to Dillingham that the object of all this was not so much to achieve victory as to carry the impression to the mass of the people that this particular fight constituted a paramount issue. Thus, regardless of results, the men at the head of both sides of a fight blessed with the sunshine of public attention would gain personal followers who would later be used to boost them into remunerative office.

If, on the other hand, it really mattered a great deal whether a bill passed or did not pass, the parties interested were willing to crawl into a caucus or accept a compromise or bind themselves politically for the future to do all sorts of things.

The rank and file of each caucus was made up of earnest dubs who could not see the wires, and men who saw the wires but hoped to get hold of one themselves in time. Of the latter, many desired to have local bills passed.

Dillingham went to the doorkeeper after he had voted blindly in this caucus and asked casually—

"What kind of a bill do you want passed?"

The guard smiled.

"To tell you the truth, old man," he said, "I want Hart County exempted from the irrigation law. This seems to me to be a pretty strong caucus. Have you got a local bill, too?"

"I want to tie something close to your eye," continued Dillingham, without answering the question.

"Shoot," urged the guard.

"Three poor burros have told me today that they are doing guard duty and otherwise packing glory for some four-eyed dub who is up here looking for mavericks to put in his voting-herd. You are the third. What hits me is that we common trash could get together and hold out for action on our bills and break up all this caucus business. If you will look up all you can I'll do the same, and we can meet at supper at the hotel and start a caucus of our own."

The guard pondered this. Legislative ways were new to him. This man might be one of the enemy sent to cause trouble in the ranks.

The guard took another glance at that straightforward, honest, searching look, and read there too much anxiety and earnestness for fraud.

"I'm playing with you, partner," he said. "My name is Gardner."

Two clumsy, warty paws found each other and grated together in a sincere if not pretty grip.

"I can't say we will do anything much, but we can see how many we can bring with us," continued Gardner.

From that time on the day flew quickly for Dillingham. When he led nine converts to the cause of insurgency into the dining-room at seven o'clock that evening and saw ten ranged around Gardner he knew the most decisive blow for the Dillingham Bill had been struck. They numbered twenty-one out of a body of one hundred and thirty-one, but it was so split by

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the issues before it that twenty-one votes might mean victory or defeat to any one side.

While the members of the supper party were worrying the consommé, or being worried by it, Dillingham formally opened the business session.

"Fellows," he said, "we all know why we're here, so there ain't no use of my shootin' off my face about that. If we can get any more here let's do it, but we've got enough to be missed right now. Also it would be a good plan for any one approached to sort of ease it out into the open that he can swing every vote in this crowd; but of course he wants his own bill passed before he buys any drinks trying.

"Also we stay together here at the hotel, mostly playing poker, so we won't want to leave, and can be got at when sent for, which I believe we will be; and all in favor of the motion say aye—those opposed, no. The ayes have it, and you can play in my room. Here, boy; tell the porter to take about four quarts of that Tennessee whisky up to Room Forty-two."

Having completed his speech to the complete satisfaction of himself, Dillingham beamed on the crowd. They were not quite so sure, but a poker game was in prospect and the rest could be decided later.

"By the way," one of the legislators—a young man who had been elected by a rural community to finish his father's term—called out, "the Roads and Bridges Committee reported your bill favorable, Dillingham."

The bridge builder of Alameda nearly fell into his coffee.

"Who told you?" he demanded.

"I heard them report," said the young man.

"What have they done with the bill now?" asked Dillingham.

"It was referred to the Appropriations Committee to see if they can spare the money."

Dillingham's surprise departed.

"That clerk was right," he muttered inaudibly. "If one does get by a committee they send it to another one."

After supper they adjourned to Dillingham's room and the two rooms adjoining, where fickle chance was wooed, with incense from the realm of Lady Nicotine and music by John Barleycorn.

Morning found the entire party too sleepy to venture out, whether the will had been there or not; and the insurgents slept until late in the afternoon, when the game was again under way.

It was not until the afternoon of the second day that the insurgents were found. They had been missed at once, because every caucus floor leader had been checking off his list of voters in his sleep and after each meal to make sure he had lost none.

The lines were tightly drawn in this Legislature. Votes had cost time, and before the record was complete they might cost money.

THE poker game was interrupted by a spare little man who wished to speak to the Honorable Carl Johnson, legislator from Sam Houston County. Carl stepped into the hallway. Dillingham took up a position with his ear carefully fitted over the one-fourth-inch aperture between the door and wall.

It had occurred to Dillingham that rather than have anything wrong said he might prefer to knock some one down with his six-shooter, a piece of machinery that in this day of improved firearms might have been mistaken for the driving-rod of a locomotive.

But Carl knew his lesson. He explained that he did not care to return to the legislative hall unless he could have his bill exempting from taxation the sand and shell taken from the river in his County made a law. Under those circumstances he thought he could deliver all of the votes in that poker game against the railroad consoli ation bill.

After half an hour of uninterrupted poker-playing another messenger came. Thereafter they came more rapidly, and whenever the same man returned a second time declaring the bill in question was now a law he was given another bill to be passed. These were traded around in such a manner as not to work off more than three on any one caucus for fear of exciting suspicion.

However, there was not much danger of suspicion, as the poker game seemed to answer all questions as to why these men were gathered together. Nor was it a new thing for legislators to be hard to find during the most important sessions. When Gabriel blows his horn many a legislator, as he puts up his ante, will remark:

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"Hear that? My brother-in-law's got one like that on his roadster. Some racket, eh? I have neither mustache nor sleeves, gentlemen; this will be an honest deal."

Meanwhile in the House each caucus leader had heard in strictest confidence that he might get twenty-one more votes by passing a local bill. Forthwith they were passed. The opposition would also be marking time, hoping for the return of its lost voters and dreaming of more to come with them. There was plenty of time to pass local bills, and forthwith they were passed. Every one feared a filibuster, and no bill was opposed lest it lead to an endless wrangle.

Twenty-one bills were passed in two days that were tense with suspense, but very unproductive of action on the platform demands. When the last of the twenty-one bills had been passed the poker party was declared to have served its purpose, and was thereupon adjourned after each of the insurgents had pledged loyalty forever to Dillingham.

News was carried back to the legislative hall that Dillingham of Alameda had been the leader of this bolt. However, each caucus had confidential information that Dillingham leaned that way. Therefore, when the chairman of the Prohibition caucus proposed that unanimous consent be given for Dillingham to address the House it was instantly greeted with approval.

On the arrival of the twenty-one insurgents, with Dillingham at their head, the legislators let out a cheer of welcome that the insurgent leader resolved at once should be heard in Brewster if he had to pay for it at ten cents a cheer in every newspaper in the State.

Over bursting vest he paraded to his desk, there to be informed that he was invited to address the House. A committee, consisting of the chairman of the Prohibition caucus, the chairman of the Anti-Prohibition caucus, and the chairman of the Anti-Consolidation caucus led him to the platform—a service which was useful as well as honorary, for Dillingham saw presidential chairs wherever he looked just at that moment.

Arriving on the platform beside the speaker, it suddenly occurred to him that he had not the faintest idea what he was to talk about. Then the speech under the pecan tree after the barbecue recurred to him. He would tell them about the western counties.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I come from a county where most of the scenery is straight up and down, with cactus for color and coyotes for action, but there is more fertile land in its valleys than in any one of the New England States. My ranch is about the size of Rhode Island. Open that great country beyond the river and you have given farms to the homeless masses of the earth."

Then followed more about the counties beyond the river, concluding with the conquest of Mexico and the planting of the Lone Star flag of Texas in the Straits of Magellan—a difficult process, to be sure, as any mariner familiar with those parts will tell you. But Dillingham was not a mariner; he was an orator.

At the conclusion of the speech there was tumultous and long-continued applause, but all of it came from one quarter of the house. From another quarter came hisses and cat calls.

In vain the speaker rapped for order. Dillingham was wondering what he had said to cause such a disturbance. When he stepped down from the platform he was seized by a group of men led by the leader of the Railroad Consolidation caucus, and carried on their shoulders to his seat.

Meanwhile another man had called for a vote on the consolidation measure. The first letters of Dillingham's name made him one of the first voters. He showed his appreciation for the cheers by voting "Aye," which brought forth more cheers and cat calls. The other insurgents were as much in the dark as to the cause of all this noise as their leader, but when their names were called they also voted aye by way of paying a debt of gratitude.

"Dillingham," said the leader of the Railroad Consolidation caucus, when the vote was announced and the bill passed, "your speech has passed the bill."

"I thought the bill was passed before I got here," exclaimed Dillingham.

"Yours was, but you have carried mine; I felt sure you would," answered the leader.

"Well, how could my speech affect the Railroad Consolidation bill," demanded Dillingham, "when I was talking about the bridge bill?"

"What bridge bill?" asked the caucus leader.

"My bridge bill," replied Dillingham.

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"Oh, yes," exclaimed the caucus leader. "I passed your bill, but I hadn't read it. But you didn't say anything about the bridge bill in your speech."

"I didn't suppose I had to," said Dillingham. "We fought all over Alameda County about it in the last primaries, and you folks had just passed it."

"Yes, that's true; but most of these fellows don't know where Alameda County is. And anyway, we have passed a local bill for every one of you fellows in that poker game, and none of us knew what any of them were about."

"Well, then, we're hoss an' hoss, and nobody owes anybody nothing," said Dillingham, smiling.

"You don't get the idea," explained the caucus leader. "This railroad consolidation bill is to open the way for new lines in the West. The farmers in East Texas think it's crooked. You went into the fight so hard today that every man who voted for that bill expects you to run for Governor on it. You've got to run."

"All right," said Dillingham. "Only hobble yourself around near me somewhere so I can keep up the bluff."

The caucus leader grinned his assent. Dillingham's face suddenly clouded.

"Say," he exclaimed. "I can't run for Governor. I got to go home right away. They'll have all the school kids out with flags to meet me at the depot, and the Women's Foreign Mission Society will give a supper, and the Secretary of the Brewster Commercial Club will make a speech. I got to go home. I can't run."

"Well, you don't start running for a year," reassured the caucus leader.

"That's all right, then," sighed Dillingham. "You ought to come out to Brewster for the fun," he added. "It'll be the biggest thing since the battle of the Alamo."

The Camp-Fire

A MEETING-PLACE for READERS, WRITERS and ADVENTURERS

MOST of us are interested in lying. Many are interested in the truth. When you can't tell lying from the truth everybody gets excited. George Shepherd, who wrote "For La Soledad," has this to say about those stories which are so good that every one takes them to be lies—and very clumsy lies at that:

For instance, I came home from Brazil one time with a tale about traveling up the Madeira River in a big lighter towed by a tug, and how one evening enough fish jumped aboard the lighter to feed all hands for 24 hours. That, I take it, is a pretty decent fish story. But do you suppose I could get anybody to believe it? Do you believe it yourself? (It's the solemn, unvarnished truth, though.)

Another time, in the mountains of Central America I came across an old Indian woman who was living in a little palm shack by herself. Being an Indian, and therefore lazy, she had a number of unpatented labor-saving devices to help her in her housekeeping. The most ingenious of these was a moth-eaten, clipped-wing wild turkey which she had reduced to domesticity. Whenever the old lady wanted to fan the embers of a dying-out fire into a blaze, she would grab the turkey by the neck and jam its back down into the hot ashes. The poor bird would protest by a violent flapping of its wings, thus fanning the fire into the desired blaze.

Another man and I saw this together, and we immediately made a bet as to which of us would first be able to find some one who would believe it. Years passed. In spite of strenuous efforts which accomplished nothing beyond ruining our reputations for veracity, the bet remained undecided. Finally a man (an author, by the way; deduce anything from that you like), told me he believed me, and acted as if he really did. In the moment of victory I was curious. I asked him why he believed it. "Because," he said, "I don't think any one" (he said "any one," but he looked straight at me when he said it), "has the brains to invent a thing like that." I haven't told that story for some time.

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"THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL," play and book, needs no introduction to most of you. Close to a million copies of the novel have been sold, and it has been translated into fourteen different languages. (In Brazil it forms a portion of the library for the blind.) The play has proved a huge success in America, England, France, Germany, and Australia. I think you will like "The Laughing Cavalier" fully as well—this quick-moving story of the man who sat for Frans Hals' famous painting and was an ancestor of the *Scarlet Pimpernel* himself.

The Baroness Orczy was born in Hungary, at Torna-Ors, in the very heart of the most magnificent grain land in Europe. Her father was a musician of note, and Wagner, Liszt, Gounod, Massenet and others were intimate guests at his house. Her own tastes ran in other directions.

BEFORE she was fifteen her parents moved to England. "I think that few people who did not know that I am a Hungarian by birth would guess from my speech that I am anything but English." She studied art, was at one time a constant exhibitor at the Royal Academy, was married to an artist of note, Mr. Montagu Barstow, and with him did excellent work in black-and-white for books and magazines.

The field of writing was entered unexpectedly, almost by accident, but the start once made, success came rapidly.

I now live in Kent, and am devoted to my garden and passionately fond of horses. I have a team of five Hungarians which I myself drive about the country, where the width of the roads permits. I drive them Hungarian fashion—two wheelers, three leaders—and then we fly like the wind. But the multiplicity of motor cars has spoiled the pleasure of driving; noise and dust are maddening to highly strung horses. Motors are for utility. But to sit behind a well appointed and well matched team, to handle the ribbons and feel that there is life at the ends of them, is the most exhilarating recreation in the world.

DR. J. U. GIESY, who is a practising physician in Salt Lake City, tells the following anecdote, which has absolutely nothing whatever to do with his story in this issue:

I remember a German who, owing to a difference of opinion in a saloon, had his cheek laid open from temple to chin. I was called to sew him up. He was six feet two, about 225 in weight, drunk and mad. I was five feet six, weighed 125, and the odds were obvious. He started right in to talk war medicine as soon as I started to fix the cut. Things did not appear favorable. Then I started after his pride.

"You're a German, aren't you?" said I.

"*Ja*," he admitted at once.

"I thought the Germans were a brave people," I remarked.

"They are," he declared.

"And yet you, who come of such stock, sit around and howl over having a cut stitched up! You're no German; you're a baby," I averred.

He looked at me a minute, sat up in his chair, and—"Sew it up," said he.

Do you think he'd bat an eye while the eighteen stitches were put in? Not he. He even begged me to make it twenty, just to show that the Germans were game.

So much for pride of race.

SOMETIMES I think there is more real human drama crowded into the page or so of our Lost Trails column than into any other page I have ever read. A little item of two or three lines can stand for so much of human tragedy and mystery! Here are the things in real life that so many think happen only in fiction. And into what strange byways of the world they carry us!

SOME items stand month after month, and the answer is silence. In some cases I happen to know they are there only as a forlorn hope that the lost one who is almost given up as dead may after all be living somewhere.

But some are happier. You will notice that some items fail to reappear. The lost has been found. Many stand only for friends separated by the years; some, for old comrades needed quickly for a new enterprise. They are as various as life itself, and the results as various as fate. Here are some of the happy ones:

PLATTSBURG, N. Y.

I have located Thomas J. Kelly, whom I had you place a notice in your Lost Trails dept. of ADVENTURE MAGAZINE for. And I can't speak too much in praise for ADVENTURE in helping me out the way it did. After I looked for Kelly for three years ADVENTURE found him the second month they printed my notice, which I think is doing fine. I got one answer from Exeter, Cal., and another from Oakland, Cal., and my third from Kelly himself in New York City.—JOSEPH R. BRANDAMOUR.

VANCOUVER, B. C.

PERMIT me to thank you for placing among the Lost Trails my inquiry for Wm. Le Vonde. I have not yet found my friend, but have received information concerning his location up to last June; from there on he has left a trail which will be easy to follow. For four years have I been looking for my old companion of many adventures. I have

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advertised in most of the large newspapers throughout the United States, but without results. My inquiry appeared in the December number of ADVENTURE, and before the month is half over the desired results are obtained.

Some months ago I saw an article in the Camp-Fire from some person who placed very little confidence in the different departments of ADVENTURE MAGAZINE. Perhaps if that same skeptic could hear my say he would change his mind concerning the ability of the Camp-Fire in bringing together the trails of old friends whom the years have separated. —W. L. CUMMING.

And a later letter from the same man:

YOU certainly are at liberty to run any of my letters in the Camp-Fire at any time you may wish to do so. Since I last wrote you I have heard from Wm. Le Vonde, having located him in Salt Lake City, Utah. I am sure I would never have found him, had not my inquiry appeared among the Lost Trails.

I wish to thank both yourself and my Camp-Fire friends for the help you have all so kindly given in this matter.—W. L. CUMMING.

P. S. Le Vonde and myself will be hitting the trail again very shortly, and should anything of interest turn up I will let you hear of it.

W. L. C.

IT MAY interest you to know how I found an old friend through your Lost Trails column.

I ran into a little fellow in Spain in 1899. We spent three or four months together kicking around the Mediterranean. All I knew about him was his name and that he came from some part of America. All he knew about me was my name and that I came from Australia. Looking back on the experience I confess we showed a considerable lack of curiosity about each other.

After about four months of the David and Jonathan business, one night when we were in a small town in Southern Italy he told me that he had had a telegram from his mother demanding his presence in Paris. He said he would be away for a couple of weeks perhaps, and went away without giving me his address. I waited in that Italian town four months without receiving word from him. Then in the course of time I returned to Australia, and for fourteen years did not hear one word from or of him, although I made inquiries in different parts of America every time I visited that country.

A few months ago, as a sort of forlorn hope, I put a notice in ADVENTURE, and within one month located my man in Oregon. Since then we have cleared up, by correspondence, the silence of the past fourteen years.

I thought you might be interested to know what a dandy little friend-finder ADVENTURE is.

Yours sincerely, AUSTRALIAN.

BORN in the "Bloody Third" ward of Milwaukee. At age of five sold copy of Mandan, Dakota, *Times* to Sitting Bull by dropping it at his feet and running. At eight wrote verses and killed prairie chickens with .44 repeater from forked stick rest. Set type at ten, and hobnobbed with Scarface Charley, Rain-in-the-Face, Man-Afraid-of-His-Horse, etc. Years devoted to reading, hunting, doing everything connected with a newspaper office, and licking tuberculosis with athletics. In 1898 corporal, Co. C, 1st Wis. Vols. Typhoid. 1899, first sergeant, Co. H, 38th Vols.; 1900, Philippines, "mentioned once or twice in field dispatches, so they say. Can't prove it." Sixteen engagements. Ordered up for exams. for commission in Regulars. Refused exams. Mustered out at Presidio, June 30. Politics, more newspapers. Auctioneering. Teacher of same. This is R. B. MacRorie, who wrote "The Heart of the Volunteer," a tale that may produce some discussion between Volunteers and Regulars. In his own words:

I have sold from Massachusetts to Montana, and from Canada to Arizona. I am 37 years old, big, fat and saucy, and I never had a real adventure in my whole life. Never killed a man that I know of, or robbed a widow or a blind man. Far away from home they think I am a salesman and understand human nature a bit, but my dear old mother says I'm only a big boy and a kind of fool kid at that. Selah!

Here is a line from him on his story in this issue:

At a banquet in Manila, in May, 1901, a few West Pointers gathered together and told their experiences while serving in the Islands. Some of them held temporary rank in the Volunteers, and one—a Major in the 38th—stated that for work and service, loyalty and efficiency, the Volunteers under his command stood supreme, and some of the non-coms were the military equals of the product of the Point!

SOME months ago we printed in the Wanted column an item from a man who was stated to be 9 ft. 1 in. tall. He wasn't. He didn't say he was. We knew at the time that he wasn't. But either we did some careless proof-reading or the printer turned a 6 upside down and made a 9 of it.

THE following is only a sample of the letters we get applying for our free identification-cards. The demand for them is constant, and a large percentage is from those who have had the practical need for such cards proved to them by bitter experience.

I can readily see the usefulness, and even necessity, of these cards; for, when I was taken down with fever three years ago while carrying messages

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between the Maderista rebel junta in El Paso and the rebel army of Madero in Mexico, I had no identification on me, and was taken care of by some hospitable Americans down on the border for a couple of days. Again, several weeks later, after having had neither food nor water for several days, I attempted to cross the line above El Paso, was captured by American troops, and taken care of under the name of "John Doe" for several days, as I had no identification on me and was so weak from exhaustion that I could not talk.—L. F. CONVERSE.

HERE, again, is the brief explanation of our identification-cards. They are offered free of charge to any of you. All we ask is that you comply carefully with the simple directions as they appear below in italics:

The cards bear this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Later, arrangements may perhaps be made for money deposits to cover cable or telegraph notifications. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications without the two names and two addresses in full.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag of aluminum, proof against heat, water and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give the two names and addresses in full when applying.*

WHEN I wrote to Prince Sarath Ghosh (then in Seattle after a year's sojourn west of the Rockies) for data to give the Camp-Fire concerning himself and his tale in this issue, I knew only that he wrote good stories for magazines in this country and England. I am so sure you will be interested in what he replied that I am giving you all of it I can possibly find room for.

It seems that he is a nephew of the Rajah of Ghoshpura in India, was brought up in the traditional lore of the Orient, and was then sent to Oxford and Cambridge. He began writing through being persuaded to send to an English magazine a forgotten account of an adventure of his with a tiger. It was accepted—as fiction. And he says he has not yet been compelled to *invent* a single plot, merely drawing on actual happenings he has seen or heard of.

Since my college days fifteen years ago, I have traveled several times between Europe and Asia, and once around the world; but I can not claim to have met many thrilling adventures myself—after the first. Of course I have occasionally been after tigers, on elephants, as the guest of some Rajah; also I have spent a few nights in the jungle with a *shikari* (professional hunter.) Sleeping just anywhere, preferably on a tree for safety.

I MUST say that the jungles of India have a peculiar fascination for those who have spent even a few nights there. King George set the fashion when he visited India in 1905 as Prince of Wales, and wanted to see the wild animals at the midnight pool. So a space on the opposite bank was enclosed with a tall wire netting cunningly covered with leaves and boughs to look like the natural jungle.

First came the wild elephants, being the lords of the jungle. In single file, along a beaten track. The vanguard was composed of bulls; on reaching the bank they walked along it down the stream. Then came the cows and calves, and they ranged up along the bank after the vanguard. Finally a rear-guard of bulls. When the whole herd had arrived, they stood in a long line along the bank—the cows and calves in the middle — each facing the water. Then simultaneously they dipped their trunks and drank—lest otherwise any one should muddy the water for his neighbor.

THE rest of the denizens followed; but, as they came after the lords, they drank *above* them on the stream; for now the water was muddy where the elephants had drunk. That is the unwritten law of the jungle! And that happens every night. But let us see what else happens.

The wild buffaloes come next. A vanguard of bulls, two or more abreast, as the ground permits; then cows and calves; finally a rear-guard of bulls; each line with *leveled* horns—for the foe, the marauding tiger, is waiting on the high ground for its last chance of a meal for the day. And after drinking, line by line—while the rest keep watch—each line of buffaloes comes around to the rear and faces landward: thus when they have all drunk they are again in a solid formation and ready to march, bulls in front and rear, cows and calves in the middle, except that the vanguard and rear-guard have changed places. Just like a disciplined army. Taught by the fear of the tiger.

MEANWHILE, while yet the elephants are present downstream and the buffaloes are drinking upstream, the lesser denizens creep in for protection between the two; just anywhere, singly, or by twos and threes. But the timid blue doe creeps in beneath the very horns of the buffaloes, casting fearful eyes at the high ground where the tiger, the leopard, the panther, are lusting for her. And the buffaloes—true knights and proud of their chivalry—do not finish drinking till she has. Then, creeping around beside her protectors, she reaches the high ground with them, looks to right and left —and with a sudden bound vanishes. And with a snarl of baffled rage the tiger, the panther, and the leopard recover from their foiled leap, and each glares at the others for spoiling its sport.

BUT my hero is Moolraj. He is a real person, and possibly the most wonderful *shikari* of this generation. A *shikari* is something like the trapper of America in the past; he lives by hunting, and also

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makes a profit on the skins. Afterward he enters the service of some Rajah, and organizes hunts for his master and his guests—if he be lucky enough; the less fortunate ones getting eaten before the age of forty.

Moolraj, now at the age of fifty, is nominally in my uncle's service, but in reality is retired on pension from active work—and he just loves to recount his deeds of peril to the young bloods that visit my uncle's place, British or Hindu.

MOOLRAJ began public life at the age of fifteen as an apprentice forest ranger. Those who have read Kipling's "Jungle Book" will remember Mowgli, the boy who lived among wild animals. A *shikari* in India practically does that. As an apprentice, Moolraj learned woodcraft and junglecraft under an older *shikari*. At twenty he was a full ranger, and knew the general habits of the animals; and at twenty-five was an under-*shikari*.

At thirty, about the usual age, Moolraj became a full *shikari*. By that time he knew the exact habits of each species of animals, and could tell what particular kind to expect under any given condition. Meanwhile, like most expert *shikaris*, Moolraj became a serpent charmer. He could take his flute into the jungle, start playing, and soon have all the cobras within hearing coming up to him, forming a circle around him, and swaying their bodies in rhythm! The story of Orpheus is true as regards the cobra, if the musical instrument be flute, fife, or violin.

ABOUT this time happened the incident which I have used in my story "The Queen of the Species." The main facts are true. They are not unique—for India.

Moolraj then relinquished the occasional work of a serpent charmer, and roamed the jungle for the next ten years as a *shikari;* when he was not actually wanted on his master's service, he used to hunt on his own, and thus kept his senses keen.

That is most essential to an expert *shikari*. Moolraj's faculties were so marvelously keen that he could read the jungle like an open book. He would examine signs invisible to the ordinary man, run breathlessly for a mile, pause under a tree to note something, turn away toward a stream, then sharp down into a ravine—then calmly explain what he had read.

"Last night a *sambur* (red deer) was browsing where I first paused; it scented danger, fled before the wind for a mile, then stopped under that tree to browse again, thinking that it had gone beyond pursuit, and drank from that stream. Then suddenly with its nose to the water it scented danger again, and bolted down the ravine. But the pair of panthers that had caused the alarm did not take the ravine. Instead, by a clever move, they outflanked the *sambur*, and went up the slope from the side. Thus they pounced down on the *sambur* from above—and if we care to go down the ravine we shall probably find the panthers sleeping off the effects of their heavy gorge."

And Moolraj could tell all that, though the ordinary man could not see a line on the hard, dry ground!

TO SHOW that the hereditary knowledge of *shikaris* is scientifically accurate, I shall quote the remarkable testimony of a great Englishman. The late Sir Joseph Fayrer was probably the greatest authority in the world on serpent poisons. *Shikaris* had asserted that the cobra could kill with its poison *all other animals*, including less venomous serpents; but English observers thought that the mongoose alone was immune.

This is a wonderful little animal, no bigger than a cat, which invariably attacks a cobra at sight; and after a splendid fight (which I shall describe some day) the mongoose always wins by sheer tactics, and at last jumps on the cobra's head and rends it in twain. That shows the quickness of the mongoose: the cobra itself is almost as quick as lightning—and the mongoose is a little quicker.

In a series of experiments tried by Fayrer the mongoose was handicapped by being put in a narrow space, so that it could not escape from the cobra; and the two fought a dozen rounds in which the mongoose was apparently *bitten several times*—in fact its body was bleeding all over from the cobra's fangs; and one such bite would have sufficed to turn any other being into a blackened corpse within ten minutes. Hence the supposed immunity of the mongoose.

THEN, on further investigation, a remarkable discovery was made. It seems that, after biting, the cobra needs about one-tenth of a second in which to inject the poison (by releasing the sphincter muscle controlling the poison gland), but the mongoose never gave even that one-tenth of a second after a bite: it jumped clear away. Thus finally it got a chance—and killed the cobra. Otherwise, of course, if the mongoose be cruelly held down and the cobra be allowed to bite it and inject the poison, the mongoose will die in a few minutes.

IN THOSE ten years of juhgle-roaming as independent *shikari* Moolraj passed through a series of marvelous adventures; rather, the marvel was that he escaped with his life, whereas most *shikaris* get killed about that period. The ninety-nine get killed, but the one survivor has something worth telling. Not only perils from animals, but also from men—Dacoits and Thugs.

SOME day we'll try to have some more from Prince Sarath Ghosh. Meanwhile he has brought up a point about which I've long been curious: that the skeleton—and, of course, ivory—of an elephant that has died a natural death has never been found in India. Others have told me it has never been found anywhere else. Hence the steadfast rumors of unfound "elephant cemeteries" with huge fortunes in ivory awaiting the lucky man who finds one of them. Come forward, you who know, and tell the rest of us.

IN RESPONSE to constant inquiries we have secured from the Secretary of the Adventurers' Club a brief statement of its aims, nature, how to join it, etc., which will be sent on request. The club has no connection with this or any other magazine.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN

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WANTED —MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the Camp-Fire, free of charge, to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

WANTED for South Sea cruise and exploit, one man, healthy, 25 or less, gold miner, sober, social, obliging and strictly honest.

Man, gasoline engineer, not over 25, healthy, good education, sober, social, honest, obliging, to do repairs.

Mess boy, willing, 15, good habits, must have parents' permission, and be trustworthy.

Boy, 15 years, healthy, reliable and absolutely trustworthy, as secretary, and clerical work.

All must send their photos, one showing them in stripped condition, one fully dressed. All must be of German or Irish descent. No bullies need apply. Wages, each man 10% of brutto earnings and all expenses, each boy 5% of brutto earnings and all expenses. Time 10-12 months, strictly legal proposition.—Address CUSTER, Manager, care of ADVENTURE.

Inquires for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

PROSPECTOR with upward of 25 years' experience in mining camps on Pacific Coast desires to make a Summer's campaign in Southeastern British Columbia to further explore a practically unknown gold, copper, and silver district on west slope of the Selkirk Range. Exceptional possibilities for discovery of minerals in addition to ideal Summer's outing if nothing else comes out of it. Plenty of big game and fishing. Will act as guide and make self generally useful about camp. Past experience should make this service invaluable. Wish to correspond with a few men who will join and finance the trip and share in results equally. Expenses should not exceed $300 for each person.—Address C. R. MARTIN, Chinese Camp, Tuolumne Co., California.

EXPEDITION to Central America for gold, hardwood, pearls and timber, notice of which was published in December, is abandoned for this year.—CAPT. H. C. GRIMM, 26 Burnside Ave., San Francisco, Calif.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relatives Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

GEORGE HAVELOCK WILLING FOY ("HAL"). One hundred dollars reward for information leading to restoration to friends. Irishman, last heard of with a prospecting party in Honolulu, October, 1912. Thought to have gone later to Mexico or Peru. 28; 5 ft. 8½ in.; fresh complexion; brown hair, eyes; well built, military figure.—Address his father, REV. EDWARD A. FOY, The Rectory, Lisnadill, Armagh, Ireland.

ARTHUR R. COCKRILL, my brother. 20 years; last heard from 2½ years ago near Wichita, Kan., on a farm.—Address MRS. L. D. CURREY, 111 S. Elliott Pl., Brooklyn, N. Y.

WILLIAM C. LYONS, years ago in California, about Redding.—Address his sister, ANNA E. LYONS, 1907 Biltmore St., Washington, D. C., or HENRY C. MEIGS, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

RELATIVES of Charles Livingston Wilson, born Kentucky. About 70. Brother James was a Mississippi River Captain. Also a brother John, and two sisters both married to ministers; name of one was Cansadie Wilson.—Address CHARLES C. WILSON, Patricia Hotel, Vancouver, B. C.

PAUL RAY, last seen in Oklahoma a few years ago. 5 ft. 6 in., weighs about 150; small scar on left cheek.—Address MILTON GOLDSMITH, U. S. S. *West Virginia*, Bremerton, Wash.

JOE TRAVIS, big of body and laugh. Was American adviser to Dr. Marks, in charge of Chinese reception to battleship fleet at Amoy in cruise around world. Probably at newspaper or advertising work somewhere between Suez and Yokohama.—Address DR. C. J. MINER, B. P. O. E. 894, Galesburg, Ill.

"DART" SEWELL, Mgr. of River Side Park, Eaton, 1906. Last heard of in Canada. Please write.—Address RICHARD ADDISON, Columbia Theater, Muncie, Ind.

ERSKINE ("ERK") HESS. Born Buckhannon, W. Va. About 29. Short and stocky. Light hair and gray eyes. Hotel steward. Last seen in New York, supposedly *en route* to Australia or New Zealand. May be in U. S. Navy. My brother-in-law.—Address R. M. HEFNER, Box 201, Bradentown, Florida.

EDWARD MOLERES, in employ of Raceland Plantation, Louisiana, 1901-2; also worked as clerk in an emigration agency, New Orleans. Write.—Address E. CORMIER, La Corona Hotel, 453-465 Guy St., Montreal.

E. B. STEWART of Milwaukee and New Orleans, write. —Address L. T. 220.

BABE WILLIAMS, with Cal. Messenger Service, Oakland, in 1910. Last heard of in Los Angeles.—Address H. A. HAMMILL, Heighton, Sask., Can.

GEORGE R. DUNCAN, who lived on a farm near Kremlin, Oklahoma, in 1895. Said to have moved to Colorado a year or two afterward. About 48, light complexion.—Address J. B. DUNCAN, Grace Hotel, 414 Market St., St. Louis, Mo.

"FIGHTING JACK" BONHAM. Was in Los Angeles, May, 1911, at Hotel Rockford. Played piano. Said to have been in Mexican revolution of 1910 and supposed to be taking part in the later disturbances there. Supposed to be the Jack Bonham advertised for in another item in this column. If so, please write his mother.—Address MRS. JEAN BONHAM, Care ADVENTURE.

EGYPTIAN SERVICE MEDAL. Found in San Antonio, Texas, about August, 1913, by Sergeant Baumann, 3rd Cavalry, lying in grass with ribbon and Expert Rifleman badge of U. S. Army attached. Advertised without result. Evidently belongs to an old soldier of both British and American armies, retired. Silver medal with disc pendent and 3 bars—"Kirbekan," "The Nile 1884-85," "El-Teb-Tamaai." One side disc: "Egypt" and bas-relief figure of Sphinx. Other side: "Victoria Regina et Imperatrix" and bas-relief of Queen Victoria. Around edge of disc: "Private ———, Camel Corps, Egypt, R. S. G." Turned over, January, 1914, to present holder, who will return it to owner on his filling out the blank that

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stands here for his name.—Address DONALD FRANCIS MCGREW, Care ADVENTURE.

R. MACDONALD, in 18th British Hussars, 4th and 7th U. S. Cav. In Winnipeg summer of 1913. Also E. L. Davis, who left Winnipeg in Aug., 1913, for Minnedosa, Manitoba.—Address VAL. J. MACKENNA, General Delivery, Wahpeton, N. Dakota.

ED. MACKIE, with Bellevue Service in El Paso, or friends knowing his whereabouts, please write.—Address MISS EVA CLIFTON, Gen'l Del., Texarkana, Tex.

VAN WAGONER, known as Dutch. Last heard of in Shanghai, China. We were on the ship *Saratoga* together.—Address L. T. 225.

BOE W. GILLESPIE, N. A. Blackham, E. H. Stout, Edw. Powers and Max Davidman.—Address GUY E. NEFF, Care of ADVENTURE.

WILL Z. MOOREHEAD, who hunted orchids with me in the jungles of Panama, write.—TED DICKSON, JR., *Morning Journal*, Key West, Fla.

IVER C. KALE, alias Jesse Allen or Bob Fife. Miner. Last heard from at Rio Janeiro, 1912.—Address SAM REED, Nogales, Ariz.

LEROY SMILEY and Clarence Embree.—Address SCOTTY GORDON, St. Maries, Idaho.

EDWARD J. SHEHAN.—Address his aunt, NELLIE HOLLAND, 908 N. Hamlin Ave., Chicago, Ill.

GEORGE AND TOM BROOKS. Father and aunt want address.—Address MRS. LYDIA M. RICE, 769 S. Wall St., Columbus, O.

JOE L. McDONALD. News of importance at home.—Address K. J. McDONALD, Midland, Beaver Co., Pa.

CHARLES HAMILTON, with me in Mexico, 1911. Also C. P. Kelley, Yuma; J. W. S. Gallup, Gibson Mines, Los Angeles. Address No. W 218.

OSCAR WEINER, left home 1910, age 15. Brown hair, gray eyes, scars on each side of eyes.—Address MRS. S. WEINER, 739 Gates Avenue, Brooklyn, N. Y.

MIKE HINDS, my brother, last heard of leaving San Francisco for Alaska, July, 1910.—Address FRANK S. HINDS, Box 253, Tucumcari, N. M.

URITA, write. Greatest importance.—Address L. T. 213. Canadian papers please copy.

CHARLES A. CROWN, last heard of at Mesa, Ariz. Connected with Crown Mining Co. of "Thunder Mt." fame, in 1903.—Address MISS A. M. CROWN, 152 Vanderwoort St., No. Tonawanda, N. Y.

CHARLES HENRY RAYMOND. Suffolk regiment in Afghan war. Tattoo on arm.—Address JAMES RAYMOND, 3306 Monroe St., Toledo, O.

WILL J. (BILL) STEWART. Last seen in Mogul, Nev. Also "Slim," "Bill," and "Shorty" of the S. P. surveying-party in Verdi, Nev.—Address G. D. BARR, Box Sheffield Sta., Kansas City, Mo.

CAPT. of Co. B at Tia Juana, Billy Gregg-Anderson, wireless operator.—Address No. L. T. 219.

B. W. (or BERT) CHADWICK. Wife and little daughter would greet him gladly and aid him if necessary. Address MRS. CLARA CHADWICK, General Delivery, Boise, Idaho.

CAPT. R. J. SMITH, whom I met in Orient, Cuba; well known in Central America.—Address L. T. 221.

F. V. GROVES. Send address.—Address S. M. ROSENTHAL, care Floersheimer Co., 31 W. 27th St., New York.

NO. 56, No. W 107, No. W 140, No. W 150. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to addresses given us don't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care ADVENTURE.

CHARLES, WILLIAM, ERNEST NEALE.—Address ED. NEALE, Musician, 114th Co., C. A. C., Ft. Totten, N. Y.

BOYS in 11th Infantry, 1899-1902, especially Sergt. Jas. Foley, Co. L.—Address GEORGE M. SHAFER, Moravia, N. Y.

CLYDE C. DEOTZ, GRADY S. McRAE—Address W. L. ROGERSON, 327 Lockwood Pl., Jacksonville, Ill.

JOHN SERRANO, FRANK CRIEGER, C. J. CALHOUN. Please address A. S. HOFFMAN, care ADVENTURE.

JOHN MONTGOMERY, of Illinois.—Address Box 894, Beaumont, Tex.

WALTER M. JOHNSON, 1905-06 with me in Mexico. Any one who has seen him since 1907, write.—Address HAROLD DE POLO, 92 Morningside Ave., New York City.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

JACK BONHAM. Born Hastings, Eng. Band of Royal Sussex 1900-6. To Sherbrooke, P. Q., Canada, March 1906. Last heard from Aug., 1906, Sherbrooke. Natural musician. Word wanted by mother.—Address MRS. JEAN BONHAM, care ADVENTURE.

THE following have been inquired for in "Lost Trails." They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

A—D.—Bardsley, John W. ("Red"); Brooks, Al. H., rancher, Canada; Christensen, A. G., South America; Connelly, Jim, Co. I, 9th U. S. I.; Cory, Willis (Red, Kentuck, or Wins Golden), Philippines, Tex., Calif.; Crane, Roland Henry; Crawford, John and Lee; Cunningham, Patrick, Michael and James; Culp, Simon P.; Dalziel, James, bark *Socotra;* Day, Stanley; Dean, George, whaling bark *Canton;* Deckard, Ed (Wessel); Dwight, L. H., Hospital Corps, Philippines, 1900.

E—L.—Engesser, Conrad A.; Francis, Henry, *Trenton*, Samoa; Gibney, Jimmie; Gollrick, Charles, once U. S. N. H. C.; Gulliver, Iquique, '98; Haddock, John, Sr., of Dawson; Harson, Wm.; Haskinson, Gordon (English); Hellmann, H. H.; Hiatt, brother of Claud; Irvin, Howard, on *Maitai*, '11; Jasper, Key West, Mexico; Jay, Wilburn, Madero Foreign Legion; Jessup, Theodore V.; Knudsen, Fred, *Red Rock, Balmoral, Willis A. Holden;* Landrum, J. W., Kentuckian; Lane, Martin, U. S. A., Klondike; Law, Gordon; Lee, John R.; Le Vonde, William.

M—P.—McDaniel, Frank, pugilist, drummer; McDaniels, Taylor, Hospital Corps, Philippines; MacDonald, John Ava; McElvain, William; McGonigal, Ed., U. S. S. *Lancaster;* MacNeill, Jack V. ("Robbie"), artist; McKinzie, J. W., formerly U. S. N.; Martel, Dick, Hermosillo; Megie, Benjamin F., South America or South Africa; Meissner, Pete, Grajervo; Mentusha, Big; Meyrick, Lieut. Archibald, Prince of Wales's Light Horse, Boer War; Miller, Frank; Moriarty, John F., Madero Foreign Legion; Morine, Capt. C. D.; Morris, "Lee" or P. M.; Morris, Thomas George Dixon; Moulder, Joe; O'Neil, Captain Billy; Parker, Capt. F. T.; Parker, Jess, cowpuncher; Pavilla, Jack, of "Jackly Wonders."

R—S.—Raansvaal, Isaac, Co. I., 9th U. S. I.; Rae, Clarence, P. J. R.; Raeder, Edward J.; Richardson, Frank Eply; Robertson, Harry G., Customs, Manila; Rogers, Peter, of Manchester; Schaeffer, Charlie, Sonora; Scott, Fred, once Pennsylvania newspaper man; Shannon, James; Shannon, Wm.; Shepherd, Richard L., Vancouver, and Toronto; Sherwood, F. A.; Smith, F. E., *Olympia* at Manila; Smith, Oscar, Australian; Smith, William Chalmers, Mexico; Stearns, Herman; Stephenson, Robert Verne, Texan; Sutherland, Charlie, once Bechuanaland Police; Sweidert, "Dutchy" (phonetic spelling).

T—Z.—Tice, Wm. G.; West, Stanley S. (newspaper man); Wiley, Miles G.; Willbern, Walter P.

MISCELLANEOUS.—Bonavita, Capt. Jack friends of; Brook, Glen, heirs of; Boer comrades of John Bussanich at Ladysmith and along Tugela, also John Murray, Tom Morrows, James McTigh, Jack Ryan; Nesbitt, Capt., V. C., and other comrades of M. M. Marsden; Tressider, Percy, comrades of; comrades of "Lintic" O'Sea, "El Rayo;" Van Leue, Capt. F. E., comrades of; Hospital Corps 23rd U. S. Infantry, 40th U. S. V.; any one 4th Texas Vol. Infantry in Spanish War; old shipmates British bark *Lyderhorn;* A. S. O'Connor, Bob Ross, Jimmie Van Damme, Hans Kufeke, Jack Griffiths, Julian Harries, Jack Gardiner—once E and C Troops, B. S. A. P.; Percy M. DuBois, R. R. Plum, Joe Enscoe, Chas. Carruthors, Lester Selig, Thos. L. Hogan, Andy Osbourne—once of *Evening Star;* comrades in Co. E, 20th U. S. Infantry, Troop E, 7th U. S. Cavalry; T. S. M. Cottrell, Corp. McEwen, Cooper, Sergt. Dacombe, once Troop B., M. M. P.

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THE TRAIL AHEAD

For the benefit of those of our readers who want to know in advance what stories are coming to them in ADVENTURE we set aside this last page of the magazine.

THE JUNE ADVENTURE WILL BE THE BEST NUMBER WE EVER PRINTED

I NEVER said that before of any number of our magazine. We've had some I thought better than others, but this is the first time I and all of us in the office have been *sure* we had a number head and shoulders above all preceding numbers. A while ago we told you that during 1914 we were going to make ADVENTURE twice as good as it has been. So far it's been better, but not twice as good. With the June issue we strike our gait.

Here is why I say the June number, out May 3d, is the best we ever printed:—

"A DROP OF DOOM," a DAN WHEELER STORY
A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL by DR. JOHN I. COCHRANE

Author of "The Crook and the Doctor," "Cupid and the Crook," "The Open Night," etc.

Except those of Talbot Mundy, no stories we ever published made such a strong hit with our readers as did Dr. Cochrane's novelettes, told by a doctor in the prison on Blackwell's Island, about Dan (or "Sled") Wheeler, the magnetic, almost terrifying king-criminal, head of a vaguely known powerful secret order including figures of international prominence as well as picked men from the underworld—a grim, quiet, yet lion-like man, a nightmare to his enemies but worshiped by his friends. "A Drop of Doom" I know you will find far stronger even than his former stories. Best news of all, after two years too crowded for writing, Dr. Cochrane is now at work on a series of Dan Wheeler stories and novelettes. I'll say just one thing more: For *action*, I never read *any* story that compared to this one.

"THE WIZARDS," a COMPLETE NOVELETTE by FRANK BLIGHTON

THIS story, too, has a big jump to it. Both business men and adventurers will like it. The "wizards" are men who know real things about wireless. And they apply it to the international yacht races.

A TALBOT MUNDY STORY

TALBOT MUNDY is one of the half-dozen best story-tellers in the United States. And I think you'll say it with me. Our recent serial was his first, but it was seized upon months before for book publication by Scribner's in this country and Cassell's in England. And he's been writing only about two years!

In "The Gentility of Ikey Blumendall" a young Jew makes good on the battlefield.

"A CASE OF REVERSION" (a HORSE STORY) by GEORGE SHEPHERD

THIS story seems to me 'way, 'way above par. If you love horses—I say "love" because a man never merely "likes" horses; either he's indifferent to them or he loves them, however he may phrase it to himself—I think you'll remember this tale as long as you live.

"MISS DEMONSTRATOR," a STORY OF STAGE LIFE

THE first of a series by C. Hilton-Turvey. I think you'll like this jolly, pudgy woman who sells cold-cream and such to the stage folk and becomes a big factor in the real dramas laid behind the drop-curtain. We're going to meet her often now, and with her plenty of action and human nature. Sometimes she sells to the "movie" people. Keep your eye on "Miss Dem."

"THE LAUGHING CAVALIER" by BARONESS ORCZY

YOU hold in your hands the first of this four-part story, so you can judge for yourself. But the real action begins in the June (second) part. Only two more parts after that, and they get better and better.

The Other Reasons

for our knowing the June ADVENTURE will be the best we ever printed, I'll give briefly. A lot to be said about each, but I'm willing to put the case entirely in your hands with the June number itself. As already explained, we can't tell till make-up day which will be crowded out, but it will be only one or two.

The Taking of Peter Pan—By Captain George B. Rodney. If you laugh as heartily over this as we did in the office, you'll be glad you read it. Peter Pan was a jaguar, and it lived in Mexico.

The Probationer—By Carrington Boykin. A story of the fire-fighters with a big scene in it. Man's stuff.

Which?—By Lloyd Sheldon. This is the old, old business of smuggling jewels across on an Atlantic liner. Worn out? We sort of felt that way—till we read *this* story. "Believe me," it's something new.

How Bill and I Won the Pennant—By Hugh S. Fullerton. Another back-of-the-scenes tale concerning the big leagues.

Man Medicine—By Henry Oyen. A clerk becomes a soldier in the Philippines. I venture no one will quit in the middle of it. I didn't want to quit at the end.

Jack and Louis Invest—By Chester T. Crowell. Sad to say, they got drunk. Especially one of them. This story may not make you a better man, but you'll feel better.

Pure Gall—By Frank Goewey Jones. A nerve-breaking climax in business, and a man whose nerve refused to break.

A Maker of Wars—By Edgar Wallace. Africa, and a newspaper man with imagination.

The Luck of the Cards—By Stephen Chalmers and Ralph Delamere Keefer. The last, and one of the best, of the Northwest Mounted Police stories.

If You Don't Agree That the June ADVENTURE (out May 3d) Is the Strongest Number Yet, Write to Me—A. S. H.

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